

THE
STEP-SISTER.

A NOVELETTE.

BY A SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN.

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CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY PARTY.

There was a cloud on Edward Clerville's brow, a gravity on his lip, that contrasted strongly with the smiles of pleased approbation which the faces of his brother and two sisters wore. Their father had just announced to them his approaching marriage, and now looked around with some anxiety to mark the effect of the communication. The congratulations and good wishes of his daughters and their eldest brother were uttered warmly and affectionately. Edward spoke, too, with becoming respect; but there was no cordiality in his studied sentences. Mr. Clerville rose and stood on the hearth so as to face the little circle.

He was still a handsome man, notwithstanding the slight baldness upon his forehead and a little sprinkling of silver in the dark hair, which betokened that life, with him, had passed its meridian. His figure, though portly, was not un-

graceful, but rather of that comfortable fullness of proportion which almost always accompanies a genial nature and quiet, untroubled tenor of existence. As he glanced around now, his eye rested on two youths and two maidens, of whose paternity any man might justly have been proud. Frank, his eldest son—but *pardonnez mademoiselles ! precedence du dames !*

Lucy Clerville was a pale, spiritual-looking girl, on whose face it was impossible to look without involuntarily recurring to those exquisite SONNETS TO GENEVRA, which are, perhaps, equal in beauty and superior in pathos to any of Byron's other writings. Almost *petite* in size, her figure was fairy-like in lightness and proportion. No one but must have acknowledged her beautiful, but of too ethereal beauty to excite general admiration. The ordinary beholder would pause a moment and gaze, as at "some marble saint niched in cathedral wall," and then pass on to seek an earthlier divinity.

Her younger sister, Kate, was as unlike Lucy as possible. The tall, lithe figure, quick but graceful movements, and brightly, vivacious face, were of earth—surely, and, though less lovely, were more beautiful than her sister's *spirituelle* softness. She was sitting very still—with her a rare occurrence—her eyes lifted to her father's face, with an unusual expression of seriousness, notwithstanding the smile on her lips. One hand

rested carelessly on her knee, the other toyed idly with the hair of her brother Frank, next to whom she sat, the fingers twisting and untwisting the hazel curls all unconsciously to herself.

Frank Clerville's face was a very handsome one—but that was its least attraction. So bold, genial and kindly his air, that misanthropy itself must have turned abashed from a physiognomy which so obviously confuted its dark theory of man's nature. Like Kate's, his face was more serious than at most times. There was even an expression of anxiety upon it, as he glanced from his father's face to that of his brother, who leaned beside the chimney, his elbow resting on the mantle-piece, while his hand opened and shut the leaves of a book which lay thereon. Edward's physique combined the characteristics of both his sisters. The tall, symmetrical form and dark hair and eyes of Kate were tempered by the paleness and repose of Lucy's face. It did not need the presence of the book he was handling to proclaim him a student. The most careless observer would have recognized him as such at a glance. It was to him particularly that his father's eye directed itself; as he resumed what he had been saying. But Edward was probably unconscious of the gaze; for his own was bent thoughtfully, but absently upon the volume with which he trifled.

"To a sensitive mind," said Mr. Clerville,

"there is something exquisitely painful in the thought of a second marriage—even when, as I gratefully acknowledge is the case in the present instance, all the circumstances of the connection itself are unexceptionable. And I am aware that the marriage of a parent must always, in a greater or less degree, strike very coldly on the heart of a child. It is sometimes, however, necessary to—but it is needless to speak of this. Only, my dear children, let me assure you that parents are not always so selfish in affairs of that kind as is generally supposed—if I may judge others by myself, that is."

"We know, dear papa, that it is utterly impossible you could be selfish in anything; and that you have thought only of our advantage, as you always do," cried Kate; "but surely you have a right to consult your own happiness, without regard to what we think, if we could be so selfish and unreasonable as to wish you to remain unmarried." She glanced reproachfully at her brother Edward, and added, "I am sure I only wonder you did not marry years ago, and so far from being pained, I am charmed with the idea of having a mamma."

"And I am delighted that we were to have a pretty new sister," said Frank. "I think I shall fall in love with her."

"What a sweet name she has," said Lucy, in her soft voice; "Blanche Ormond."

"Blanche Clerville! how would that sound?" cried Frank. "O, I intend to marry her!"

"That is, if she will marry you," exclaimed Kate, laughing.

"I take it for granted she will not be able to resist my moustache," answered Frank, twirling that appendage as he spoke.

"How old is she, papa? and is she lively?" inquired Kate.

"She is just your own age, I believe, seventeen. Yes, she is very lively."

"And our mamma?" said Lucy. "I hope she will love us."

"Impossible not to do that," answered her father, fondly. "And you will love her too, I am sure."

"I am afraid she will think me very wild," said Kate, laughingly. "I must try and learn to be more quiet before she comes."

"She will not object to your wildness," said her father, smiling, "so long as it is but the overflowing of youthful light-heartedness, which does not pass the bounds of discretion. But, my dear children, I am happy to see that three of you at least are prepared to receive the mother I shall give you without prejudice. I thank you for your affectionate cordiality, which is more to me than, perhaps, you might imagine. You Edward—"

"I trust, sir," interrupted Edward, respect-

fully, as he, for the first time, raised his eyes to his father's face—"I trust, sir, that you do not think me deficient in affection or cordiality. I assure you," he continued, earnestly, "that my brother and sisters cannot more warmly desire your happiness than do I, or more cordially acknowledge your right to act as you think fit in this as in all things."

"That is," said his father, smiling, though there was an expression of pain on his face, "that is, you acknowledge my right to marry if I think fit, but you do not approve of my doing so."

Edward hesitated, colored and said nothing.

"Tell me, my son, why you disapprove of my proposed marriage. Speak frankly. Your objections must be either reasonable or unreasonable. If the first, I need scarcely say that I will give them due weight. If the last, I hope it may be possible to convince you of the fact."

Again Edward's usually pale cheek flushed deeply, but, seeing that his father waited for him to speak, he at length answered, "It would ill become me to question your intentions, father; but, since you desire my opinion, I must confess—I—I—it seems to me," he went on at last, desperately, "that the connecting two families together must always be injudicious."

"As a general rule, your remark is correct. But I am very sanguine that the present case will

prove the exception. Both Mrs. Ormond and myself are of an age to see the propriety of harmony in a family ; and both have, I hope, sufficient sense to maintain it. I am not an ill-natured man, and I have been assured by persons who are well acquainted with her, and on whose judgment I can rely, that she is a remarkably amiable woman. So I think we may hope your prognostics of evil will not be realized."

"If she was alone. But the young lady, her daughter," said Edward, hesitatingly, "do you think that she and my sisters—" he paused—

"May not fall to quarreling?" asked his father, smiling ; I trust not. I have the best opinion of the amiability of your sisters, which you will acknowledge is not undeserved ; and Blanche Ormond is not likely to prove a fire-brand among us, unless," he added, jestingly, "she sets fire to Frank's heart. I cannot insure him against that danger."

"I would not take the insurance if you offered it, as I intend to lay siege to hers," said Frank.

Mr. Clerville took a step towards the door—paused, and added :

"I hope and believe that you will hereafter see the wisdom of my course in this matter. I act from a sense of duty, and, if I err, I shall at least have the consolation of feeling this."

He left the room.

"What a shame for you to treat papa so, Ed

ward," exclaimed Kate, almost before her father was out of hearing.

"I am not aware that I have acted in any way disrespectfully towards my father," he answered, quietly, though the color deepened in his already flushed cheek.

"But your manner *was* so cold," said Lucy, gently. "You might have been more cordial, you know."

"Yes, you did not act well, Edward," said Frank, gravely. "And my father feels this more deeply than if all the rest of us had manifested opposition to the affair."

"Oh! papa always spoiled Edward, and this is the thanks he gets for it," said Kate.

"Might have been more cordial!" said Edward, repeating Lucy's remark. "That is, I might have compromised the truth in pretending to approve of a very imprudent marriage, for I cannot but consider it such. No, I do not think I am called upon to practice any such dissimulation."

"You might, without saying anything about approving or disapproving the marriage, have spoken affectionately to papa," Lucy observed, in a conciliatory tone. "It distressed me to see how much he was pained."

"It is very foolish of him then," cried Kate, indignantly, "to be pained by Edward's absurd ill-humor."

"Here is the first effect of this admirable affair," said Edward, ironically.

"What?"

"A disagreement among ourselves. Because my opinion does not exactly coincide with her own, Kate rates me in true feminine style. If she gives Mrs. Ormond and her daughter the benefit of the temper my father was just commending, after this fashion, I imagine they will wish they had never heard the name of Clerville, which they are both to bear, it seems," he added, sarcastically.

"Forgive me!" cried Kate, hastily. "You know, notwithstanding my father's panegyric, that my temper is of the quickest. But I did not mean to offend you really, Edward."

"I am not offended," he answered, coldly, as he took up his book and left the room.

"How very disagreeable Edward is!" said Kate, looking after him with an air of chagrin. "Now, one may quarrel with you, Frank, a dozen times a day, and laugh it off the next minute; but just chance to say anything that Edward does not like, and he makes one feel it for days afterwards by his cold, constrained manner. It is so provoking!"

She looked vexed for a moment or two, and then said, laughingly, "I do wish he would fall desperately in love with Blanche, just to pay him for his meanness."

"Don't use such a harsh word, Petting," said Frank, "and you need not wish any such thing, for I intend to marry her myself, and I should not like to have a rival in Edward, though I flatter myself I could distance him in the lady's favor."

"I am not so certain of that," cried Kate, laughing. "You are the darlindest brother in the world, and I love you a million times more than I do Edward, but I think he might be the most fascinating lover of the two. He is always so cold and indifferent, that it would be very flattering if he did unbend."

"Just hear!" exclaimed Frank. "But I believe what you say is true. Women are much more easily awed than persuaded, and do not at all appreciate a good natured fellow like myself, who condescends to admit them to an equality."

"Condescends! you impudent creature!" exclaimed Kate, and, springing towards him, she was about to take summary vengeance for his disrespectful reflection on the sex feminine, when catching her in his arms, and calling to Lucy, who had seated herself at the piano to play a waltz, he whirled her around the room until she threw herself and him on a sofa, declaring he had tired her nearly to death."

"I wonder," she said, as she shook her dark ringlets and parted them on her forehead, "I wonder if you will romp as merrily with Blanche."

"When did papa say the marriage is to take place?" asked Lucy, approaching them.

"The last day of September," answered Frank.

They were silent for some minutes.

"After all, it does seem strange and almost sad to think that papa is going to marry again," observed Kate. "And if he should not be happy, how dreadful it will be."

"But we need not fear as to that, I hope," said Lucy. "You know that papa said that Mrs. Ormond, our mamma to be, is very amiable."

"Papa said!" repeated Frank, laughing. "Of course, he would say and think that, but—"

"Why, Frank," interrupted Kate, reprovingly, "you are nearly as bad as Edward. You should not laugh and speak so of papa."

"I said no harm. Only that, in certain cases, no man's eyes are quite clear. I would not answer for my own where the lovely Blanche is concerned."

"I dare say Edward feels very badly about it," continued Kate. "He is just the sort of person to dislike such a thing as this. And then he remembers mamma, which I do not. That must make a difference."

"He ought to remember her dying request then to my father, that he would marry again, and her having made both of us promise to be dutiful and affectionate to him and the mother he might give us."

"Is it possible she wished papa to marry again?" exclaimed Kate, with an expression of the strongest interest. "Well, I do not think I could be so generous. I should so hate the idea of being forgotten. But why do you not remind Edward of this, Frank?"

"I will."

"I am afraid he may make our mamma uncomfortable by his cold manner," said Lucy.

"Oh! no; he is too gentlemanly for that," answered Frank. "What I fear is, that my father will be made unhappy by his want of cordiality. I will go and find him now, and remind him of our mother's dying wishes."

CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECTION

Mr. Clerville sought his own room. Entering, he locked the door, threw himself into a deep arm-chair beside the window, and, fixing his troubled gaze upon vacancy, yielded to a degree of mental depression which had not been his for years. He had spoken the truth when he assured his children that, in resolving to marry again, he was actuated solely by a sense of duty. The truth, but not the whole truth. To the struggles which this resolution cost him he had

not alluded. Nor had he spoken of the utter repugnance with which he still contemplated the idea of a second marriage—the opposition which his habits, as well as his inclinations, offered to it.

He had certainly acted with deliberation, believing, at the time, that he was looking at the question in every possible point of view. But now it suddenly struck him that he had made one great oversight—that while sacrificing his own feelings to what he deemed the advantage of his children, he had entirely forgotten to inquire into what their feelings might be on the subject. True, they had all seemed unaffectedly pleased but Edward; and there is a “but” to almost everything. But this “but” was, to Mr. Clerville, a but of the first magnitude. Frank was right in saying that Edward’s disapprobation would far outweigh, with their father, the approval of himself and his sisters.

Edward had always been his father’s favorite. His partiality was not shown in any way to cause jealousy or ill-feeling on the part of his other children; but the delicate health of Edward, caused first by an accident during his boyhood, and afterwards increased by his injudicious devotion to books—still more, his striking resemblance to his mother—seemed naturally to give him the first place in his father’s heart. Frank was sent to college and the two girls to a convent; but unwilling to trust Edward from under his

own eye, the father procured for him a tutor, that he might pursue his studies without the restraints of town and college life. Too close application threatened to undermine his constitution totally, and, though Mr. Clerville could not remain blind to this fact, he found his son utterly incredulous as to the injury he was doing himself. He felt that he ought to interpose his parental authority in preventing the evil; but it was more easy to make a resolution to that effect than to carry out such resolution. To deny Edward the only gratification he ever coveted—that of devotion to his books—seemed to the indulgent father an impossible severity, more especially as the boy could never be brought to acknowledge himself in ill-health, even manifesting considerable irritation at the imputation thereof. The constant anxiety endured about him had rendered Edward the paramount object of his father's thoughts; and now to discover that this beloved child would be made unhappy by this marriage was an unendurably painful thought. All the gloomy images and doubts that imagination could conceive were conjured up before him. What if, instead of a kind mother, he should be giving his children a harsh step-dame? In vain did he recall the open face and pleasant manner of Mrs Ormond. They seemed commonplace—common when compared to those of his lost Alice. With a quick, nervous start, he

rose, lifted the lamp from the table near him, approached an *escritoire* that stood in a recess opposite, and, opening its folding doors, held up the light until it illuminated a picture within. It was the portrait of his wife.

A young and beautiful face, it looked down smilingly upon the anxious and gloomy countenance raised towards it. The contrast between the man and the picture was indeed very great. Girlishly youthful was the wife—soberly middle-aged the husband. She seemed the fit inspiration for poet or painter—he the substantial representative of actual, unpoetical life.

And yet there was sentiment as well as sadness, the enthusiasm of the lover as well as the tenderness of the husband, in the gaze which he fastened on this fair effigy of his long-lost wife. He had loved her passionately, and in this one particular his heart had not grown with his years. Her memory was to him now as fresh, as deeply cherished, as in the first shock of his bitter bereavement.

Lingeringly his eye dwelt on the graceful outline of the beautiful head; the dark ringlets, that seemed almost to float around it, so life-like were they; the smooth, white brow and faintly-tinted cheek; the mouth, with its smile at once so witching and so tender; and the soft, deep-gazing dark eye! “Alice. Alice!” he murmured aloud, then covered his eyes with his hands.

When, after a moment, he again looked up, they were dim with tears. He closed the protecting door that screened his treasure from all but his own eyes, turned away, and, replacing the lamp upon the table, sank again into his chair, with a deep and long-drawn groan. Leaning back with closed eyes, his thoughts were busy with the past.

It was not the face upon canvas, but the living Alice who was before him now. Their marriage day, when he thought no face of angel could be more lovely than hers, as it gleamed on him through the floating haze of her bridal veil. He remembered the trembling touch of her little hand as he placed the ring upon her finger; the flitting blush and smile with which she heard first from the lips of the priest her marriage name. Scene upon scene of unclouded happiness rose mockingly before him. He saw her in crowded and brilliant assemblies, unspoiled by the admiration of all around, and in the quiet home hours, when she seemed to him yet more beautiful, because her beauty shone then for him alone. Her voice, her glance, her deep devotion to him!—all these crowding memories came as reproaches that he could be, or seem to be, faithless to her memory—could coldly have resolved to bestow even her very name upon another!

But it was impossible that this unjust self-reproach could continue long. Following the

accusation came the justification. Often, when in health, she had expressed the wish that he would marry again if left a widower, and, when dying, she repeated the wish with great earnestness. "I have no fear of your making an injudicious choice," she whispered faintly; "no dread that the mother you give our children will not supply my place to both you and them. And, oh! dearest Henry, I love you too well to wish selfishly that you should live solitary and unhappy. I know you will never forget me, and I am willing to share my place in your heart with another who can be beside you when I cannot. Think, too, how necessary will be a mother's guidance to our little girls. Frank and Edward may, perhaps, not need it so much, though even for them it is important. But for Lucy and Kate it is indispensable. I cannot bear to think of their going out into the world unskilled by a mother's care. And it grieves me so to think how sad you will be—all alone." She paused, exhausted, and her husband, who had heard her with grief inexpressible, controlled his feelings to answer her beseeching look. "I will try to think hereafter of what you say, Alice," he faltered; "and you know how sacred your wishes are to me; but do not ask me to promise. I cannot."

And when months and even years had passed away, and he found that, though he had learned

to live without her, he could not learn to think of giving her a successor, he altogether abandoned the thought of marrying again, satisfying himself with the reflection that, if his wife had known the utter repugnance which his feelings offered to the idea, she would not have asked or desired such a sacrifice of him.

He was almost a middle-aged man when the subject again pressed itself upon his attention by the approaching arrival at home of his daughters from the convent at which they had been educated. At first he turned from it nervously, thinking that it would have been well, perhaps, had he married when he was younger, but that now it was too late. Still the words of his wife haunted him: "I cannot bear to think of their going out into the world unshielded by a mother's care." He felt the force of this apprehension, and, after many sleepless nights of commune with his pillow, he resolved that he would not permit his feelings to interfere with the performance of what, he could not but acknowledge, was an important duty.

Not often does a widower set out in search of a wife with such a reluctance as did Mr. Clerville. And long was his search a vain one. At last, when he was almost on the point of despairing of success, he met Mrs. Ormond, a widow, with one child, a daughter about the age of Kate. Her character, manners and age rendered her in

every respect a suitable mother for his daughters, he thought. He proposed, and, after some hesitation, was accepted. Distrustful of his own resolution, he had urged Mrs. Ormond to set an early day for the marriage, hoping that, when the matter was irrevocably concluded, he should no longer be tormented by the poignant regret with which he sometimes still regarded the having yielded to what at such times he half considered an imaginary sense of duty after all. And never had this sentiment of regret affected him so deeply as at this moment, when the expression of Edward's eyes—those eyes so like his mother's—seemed to him full of reproach for this infidelity to her memory.

Meanwhile, Edward was little less troubled than his father. Greatly agitated, one moment he felt that he had been unkind, undutiful; the next, he was indignant, almost angry, shocked, incredulous, at the idea that another was about to take the place of his mother. Perhaps, though unconsciously, jealousy for himself mingled with his jealousy for her. He had been so accustomed to associate his father's love for his mother's memory with his affection for himself that he could not well bear to find the one fading, lest the other should vanish too.

Edward was not naturally selfish; on the contrary, he was generous and noble. But unbounded indulgence had made him an egotist,

without his being aware of the fact until now. Woefully discomfoting, as well as mortifying, is such a discovery to an ingenuous mind. But, once seeing his conduct in its true aspect, his first impulse was to acknowledge and repair the fault; and when Frank came to him and reminded him of their mother's wishes on this subject, he scarcely waited for his brother to conclude ere he hastened to seek his father, impatient to express his shame and contrition.

Mr. Clerville's solitude was interrupted by a knock at the door. He was surprised when, after turning the key silently, his reluctant "come in" was followed by the entrance of Edward.

"I have come to ask your forgiveness, my dear father, for the ungracious and ungrateful conduct of which I have been guilty, though I feel I do not deserve it."

His father pressed warmly the hand extended half hesitatingly by the young man.

"I was, indeed, deeply pained, my dear boy, by your evident disapprobation of the step which I am about to take. Ever to me the dearest representative of your mother, I almost felt as if her spirit was looking from your eyes reproachfully upon me."

"Dear father, forgive me for such ingratitude, which I can only excuse by the surprise your unexpected communication caused me. It was most undutiful, most selfish! Thank Heaven,

my brother and sisters did not share my fault. Frank has just reminded me of what I ought not to have forgotten: how anxious my mother was that you should marry again. Her blessing is upon your union, my dear father, and for her sake forgive your unworthy son."

CHAPTER III.

AN UNWELCOME SURPRISE.

The last day of September approached. Mr. Clerville was anxious that all of his children should be introduced to his future wife and attend his marriage; but though Edward even surpassed his brother and sisters now in his cordial approval of the affair, he was not sorry to be prevented from attending the wedding by a cold, which, not violent enough to be alarming, was yet too severe to admit of his encountering the exposure of a journey. Despite Mr. Clerville's reluctance to leave him, and disappointment that he would not be present at the ceremony, he was constrained to agree to Edward's own proposition, that he should stay and receive them on their arrival at home. They were to be gone about a week.

He passed the time as usual at his books, only rousing himself occasionally to wish that the pros-

pect of so much noise in the house was not quite so near. At length he received a note from his father desiring that the carriages might be at the landing to meet them on the evening of the next day. "We shall go down on the night boat and reach the landing at daylight, so you had better send the carriages the evening before," the note said. "I trust, my dear boy, that you have quite recovered from your cold. I forgot to tell you to write, and have been a little uneasy about you." There was a hurried line from Frank underneath. "Never mind sending but one carriage, and let Robert bring horses for Blanco, Kate and myself."

The carriage and horses were dispatched, and Edward, after taking his solitary tea, settled himself to his studies with a sigh of regret that this was probably the last time he should be able to do so in undisturbed comfort; for he had fully resolved that in expiation of his first dislike to the idea of a step-mother, he would be particularly exemplary in his manner towards her. He had even decided to be very attentive to her daughter, though it was with a feeling of nervous diffidence that he thought of this latter. He had scarcely even spoke to a young lady, and had very little to do with his sisters even, he was so shy. Kate said he was mortally afraid of anything in the shape of a woman.

It was a beautiful night. The air soft and

warm, and the moon at the full. But students are not so partial to her light as are lovers. The rays which fell across the table at which he sat, disturbed our abstracted hero. He rose to shut out the intrusive light, when, as he approached the window and had laid his hand on the curtain, the sound of musical laughter, with the less romantic clatter of horses' hoofs, surprised and startled him. He looked out, and in the clear moonlight saw three equestrians approaching the house, while the distant roll of carriage-wheels became every moment more distinct. He understood in a moment that his father's party had come down on the early boat, which arrived at the landing just after dark.

Nobody but a person as diffident as himself could possibly comprehend the tremor into which these sounds threw Edward. Mechanically, and without remembering that he was in his dressing-gown, he hurried down into the hall. The servants had also heard the approach of the party; and whether Edward's consternation or that of the fat old housekeeper was greatest, it would have puzzled a disinterested observer to decide. Edward had not screwed his courage to the preparatory point of desperate endurance; and the house-keeper, who had a "splendid" breakfast arranged, was not equally ready with what she considered a suitable supper. Before the former had recovered his presence of mind, and while

standing with his back to the hall door, a gentle hand was laid on his arm, a melodious voice exclaimed, "And this is my other brother, Edward, is it?" He turned. Blanche Ormond was looking up in his face with a smile which might have charmed an anchorite, but which only embarrassed him. He stammered out some unintelligible words as Kate introduced them to each other as "Blanche" and "Edward;" and then, the little gloved hand being hastily, almost apprehensively withdrawn from his, he hurried out to the carriage-door to meet and greet his father and his father's bride.

Blanche turned with an expression of pained surprise to Kate, as if to ask an explanation of his strange manner.

"Oh! it is only Edward's way," said Kate in reply to the look. "Did I not tell you he is the queerest mortal alive? And now I think of it, I dare say he is diffident. He never goes into society at all. Is nothing in the world but a book-worm. Come up stairs; we must change our dress. How d'ye, Mom Letty?" she exclaimed, as they came to where the housekeeper was standing; "here is your new young missis."

"She mighty pretty to be sure," said the old woman, dropping a deep courtesy as she shook the lily-fair hand of the young lady in her broad black one.

Kate threw her arm over Blanche's shoulder

and drew her up the steps, but stopped on the first landing place, and turning round burst into a fit of laughter. "Do just look at Mom Letty's courtesies to Mamma," and Blanche joined heartily in her mirth as she saw the profound obeisances of the housekeeper to her new mistress. Mrs. Clerville, after speaking kindly to the servants, who had assembled in the hall to greet her arrival, walked on to the drawing-room with Edward, on whose arm she leaned, followed by Mr. Clerville, while Lucy, after commending the two maids of Mrs. Clerville and Blanche to the hospitable cares of Letty, joined her mother and conducted her to her chamber.

"How do you like Edward, Blanche?" she asked, with her quiet smile, when she entered her sister's room a few minutes afterwards.

"I really cannot tell you yet; I had such a mere glimpse of him."

When half an hour afterwards they went down to the drawing-room, Mr. and Mrs. Clerville were already there; and Edward, (who, strange to say, had absolutely remembered to doff his dressing-gown and don drawing-room costume,) sat on the sofa beside his step-mother, and was listening with some appearance of animation to her conversation. Lucy and Kate were pleased to observe that he seemed quite cordial and easy with her. She was a handsome, or rather a fine-looking woman, with a particularly prepossessing man-

ner. Edward did not look up as they entered the room, his face being turned in the opposite direction, and consequently he did not see Blanche Ormond, (for in the hurried meeting in the hall he had not really seen her,) until she was just before him, standing in the light of a brilliant chandelier. And a lovely vision she was, he could not but acknowledge to himself. Her hair, golden as a sun-beam, hung in glittering ringlets upon her white and dimpled shoulders, shading a brow as pure as that of pictured seraph. Her eyes were blue—not violet hued, but intensely blue, as the sky is when the clouds floating away have left it deeply clear. Her whole face and the rounded and graceful form he confessed to be beautiful. Her head was half turned aside as his eye first fell upon her. She was speaking to Frank, and smiling gaily at something he had said. When she moved around and met Edward's eye, he thought her face changed—that the expression grew grave and constrained. His own manner, as he rose and bowed to her without speaking, reflected the change.

He was silent during supper, but that was not unusual with him. Frank and the girls jested and talked in a lively strain. He felt that there was an immeasurable distance between them and himself. Why? That he could not tell. In vain did he attempt to summon resolution to mingle in their conversation. Like many a diffident

student before, he knew not what to say, but listened to Frank's ready flow of small talk, wondering how on earth he could think of so many little things that so well filled conversation. He had no resource but to attach himself to Mrs. Clerville. She relieved his embarrassment insensibly, and prevented his feeling any awkwardness at not talking by talking herself.

When they returned to the drawing-room after supper, Frank opened the piano, and asking Lucy to play, declared they must have a waltz.

"Come, Blanche," said he, taking her hand.

"Are we to perform all alone?" she asked, laughing and stopping him a moment as he was about to commence. "Will not Kate and ——," she glanced towards Edward, and hesitated in her speech.

"Do come and waltz, Edward," said Frank, approaching the window to which his brother had retreated a few minutes before, when Mrs. Clerville left the room. He had drawn Blanche with him.

"I cannot," Edward answered, without looking round.

"Nonsense!" cried Kate, joining them. "A little exertion will do you good. Come on, you unsocial being!" she continued, catching his arm.

"You know that I never learned to waltz," he answered, turning around now. "I cannot take a step."

"Oh, you can easily learn," said Frank. "Hère, Blanche will teach you. She waltzes exquisitely."

"I am afraid," returned Edward, in a constrained voice, "that I cannot undertake to learn even under the tuition of Miss ———." He remembered suddenly that it was not courteous to call her Miss Ormond, when she had called him Edward. He stopped, therefore, very much embarrassed, but he only looked reserved.

"We can all three waltz together," said Blanche, quickly. Placing one arm around Kate's waist, and the other hand on Frank's shoulder, they were soon floating along at the opposite end of the room, leaving Edward thinking maledictions on his own want of presence of mind and courtesy. He watched them from his solitary corner, and a very handsome trio they were. They paused at last.

"We have quite tired Frank out," said Blanche, taking up a piece of music to fan herself. "What is the reason," she continued, turning to him, "that ladies can waltz so much longer than gentlemen?"

"I don't know, unless it is because they generally like it more than we do."

"It is so warm," said Kate. "Come out on the piazza."

Lucy left the instrument and joined them.

and Edward could hear their animated voices talking, until Kate commenced humming a popular song, when they all came in the room again, and Frank brought forward the harp, and took out Kate's guitar.

"We can have quite a concert now," said he, "Which will you take, Blanche, piano, harp or guitar?"

"I believe I make least discord on the harp," she answered.

Lucy again sat down to the piano, Blanche bent over the harp, and Kate taking the guitar, they tuned the instruments, made a few preliminary trials, and then "discoursed such eloquent music" that Edward was charmed with their performance, particularly with that of Miss Ormond. Young ladies who possess fine figures and beautiful faces (especially if they happen to have beautiful hands and arms likewise) should always cultivate a knowledge of the harp, as nothing shows these various charms to such advantage as a clever performance upon that classic and graceful instrument. Edward's admiration of the music was probably not equal to his admiration of the performer. But he listened and looked in silence, until Frank made a final unsuccessful effort to induce him to join them. He could not overcome the feeling of diffidence with which he shrank from making any approach to Blanche, even while he looked

with something like envy at Frank's easy familiarity with the lovely step-sister. "But he said he intended to marry her," he exclaimed mentally, and a pang shot through his heart at the thought. He almost felt inclined to be angry with his gay brother; and very angry he was with himself—firstly, for his discourteous tone of manner to Miss Ormond, and, secondly, because he could not banish from his mind the witching face of that fair one. It had taken fast hold of his fancy, and restless, fevered, sleepless, he went over and over again the few short hours, which seemed to him so many and so long, since he heard the first tone of Blanche's voice, and felt the touch of her fingers on his arm. Why had he been so intolerably awkward and embarrassed, he asked himself. To-morrow he would redeem his character, he determined. He would be easy and unreserved, he was resolved. And with this resolution, not destined, alas, to be fulfilled, he sank to sleep, and was soon re-plunged into the perplexities from which he had just escaped by the malicious sprite who presides over the affairs of Dreamland.

He awoke feverish and unrefreshed; dressed with trembling hand and palpitating heart, and then—there being, as he repeated to himself again and again, no possible way of avoiding it—he courageously presented himself in the family circle. But not more comfortable or at ease with

Miss Ormond did he find himself than he had been the night before. In fact the first evening was but a type of what their whole intercourse was to be. Edward could not conquer his constraint, and Blanche seemed to have contracted it from him. Almost childishly frank with every one else, there always seemed a frozen atmosphere between Edward and herself. They mutually avoided each other, and if one of them accidentally entered a room where the other happened to be alone, the meeting was so embarrassing as to be exceedingly disagreeable to both. The few words which they ever exchanged were restricted exclusively to the salutations, "good morning," and "good evening." Generally their notice of each other was but by silent bows.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT CAN THE MATTER BE ?

"Blanche," said Frank, one morning, at the breakfast table, "I have serious thoughts of falling in love with you. What do you think of it?"

"Pray do," she answered laughingly. "I fancy the idea particularly; and I hope you will be just as absurd as possible about it. But that of course. People are always perfectly ridiculous when they are in love. At least, all the cases I have ever seen were so."

"But softly," cried Frank; "If I fall in love with you, and be amusingly ridiculous, it must be on the express stipulation that you return the compliment. You understand this, of course."

"No indeed," said Blanche, laughingly. "I certainly cannot make any stipulation of the kind. That would be resigning my feminine privilege of saying

no, besides depriving you of the merit of disinterestedness."

"And then," said Kate, laughing, "the idea of such a public declaration! I know if any one was to make such a one to me, I would give his vanity the benefit of as public a rejection."

"Well, I am very much mortified," returned Frank; "but I will not despair. Perseverance seldom goes unrewarded in the end, and I hope yet to greet you as *Blanche Clerville*."

Edward involuntarily glanced at Blanche as Frank said this, and happened to catch her eye. She had not blushed at all before, but she colored crimson now. Edward colored deeply also, and wished in his heart that he was anywhere in the world but at that breakfast-table, with five pairs of eyes looking wonderingly from his face to that of Blanche, and then back again, evidently at a loss to understand why they were blushing so.

It was worse than ever with them after this, and it is not to be supposed that such singular conduct passed unnoticed by the rest of the family. Every one, however, thought fit to let it pass silently. Mr. Clerville expressed much mortification about it privately to his wife, but she begged him not to speak to Edward on the subject, as he proposed doing.

"Depend upon it, my dear, it is only diffidence," she said. "They will get over it in time, and be very good friends, I doubt not."

"Diffidence!" repeated Mr. Clerville. "It does not look at all like it. His manner is sufficiently self-possessed always."

Mrs. Clerville laughed.

"Diffidence shows itself in various ways," she observed. "I think it is nothing else."

"But why he acts in so unaccountable a manner

puzzles as well as vexes me greatly; Blanche must notice it?"

"Of course; but she never mentioned the subject to me. Indeed, the constraint is quite as much on her part as Edward's. Their first meeting must have been awkward in some way, and they cannot get over the effect of it. Let them alone, and it will wear off gradually."

Frank, Lucy and Kate also discussed the matter between themselves.

"Why do you not speak to him about it?" asked Lucy of Frank.

"I did, and he turned the subject immediately, saying that he unfortunately did not possess my faculty for playing the agreeable to young ladies, or some such thing."

"If I was Papa, I would give him a good lecture. that I would!" exclaimed Kate.

"It would do no good."

"But it is so shameful, Frank! You don't know how badly Blanche feels about it!"

"I am very sorry," said Frank; "but you see there is no remedy for the evil."

"What is the reason he dislikes me?" said Blanche one day, when Edward had hastily retreated through one door of the sitting-room as she and Kate entered the other.

"I cannot conceive what he does mean," answered Kate. "But it is not worth thinking of. Pray don't let it worry you."

"But what can be the reason of it? I am sure I never did anything to offend him! And if it was what you told me at first, that he did not like Papa's marrying again, why it would be Mamma that he disliked, not me. And he does like her; I am certain you know he is more attentive to her than

Frank is, even; and not merely ceremoniously so, but he really cares for her comfort. For instance, don't you remember the other day his riding all the way to Scarsboro' to look for her watch-key, which she had dropped on the road, she thought? No one could have expected him to do it; and he never would have taken all that trouble if he did not really care for her. No, it is only me that he dislikes, though I cannot imagine why."

"I really believe it is nothing but shyness, after all," said Kate. "Why don't you speak to him sometimes, and try to overcome his reserve? You have such a winning way that I am sure not even Edward could resist it."

But Blanche only shook her head and blushed very much.

Hollywood, Mr. Clerville's residence, was situated about the centre of one of those populous districts found often in the Southern States; where, despite the disadvantage of wide space, the society was almost as extensive and far more exclusive than can generally be found in large towns, or even cities. It is a society of the pleasantest kind, since it combines difference of individual character with equality of social position and caste. No intruders of equivocal or false pretensions interfere with the ease and non-restraint that exist. Composed entirely of that republican aristocracy, the planting community, there is a harmony and cordiality rarely met with in any other circle of social life.

Hollywood was a large, old-fashioned, not very handsome, but extremely commodious house. The wide, airy hall, the drawing-rooms, dining-room, sitting-room and library, with several pleasant little ante-rooms attached, occupied the first floor. The bay-windows of one of the drawing-rooms opened

into a fine conservatory, and double piazzas encircled three sides of the house. It was furnished in the most luxurious and tasteful manner; so that, though an artist might have quarreled with the exterior of the habitation, neither artist nor epicurian but must have conceded the interior arrangements to be perfect in taste and comfort.

Mr. Clerville's marriage was followed by the customary series of dinner and evening parties, both at home and abroad, causing, for a month or two, considerable commotion, socially. A state of affairs very much enjoyed by Frank, Lucy, Kate and Blanche, but which Edward did not at all approve. On the contrary, he considered it extremely troublesome and annoying. Not that he felt himself bound to participate in it; such a thought never entered his mind. His health was the convenient plea which not only excused his declining invitations out, but justified his keeping his own room when guests were in the house. As this was constantly the case when the family were at home, his life was almost as solitary as a monk's. It was a little curious, if any one had chosen to remark it, that he who never before could be brought to acknowledge the least tendency to ill health, now availed himself of this foregone fact so frequently. Mr. Clerville could afford to smile quietly to himself over Edward's sudden change of opinion, especially as it occurred at the very time when he himself had entirely lost those apprehensions on the subject which had for years made him miserable. Edward seemed in perfect health, he thought. True, he was very pale; but that was partly constitutional, and was more the paleness of a scholar than that of an invalid.

Though leading in some respects so anchoritish a life, our hero could not feel himself neglected. Quite the reverse. Mrs. Clerville, like a wise woman, had

adopted fully all her husband's tastes and opinions; and most particularly, it seemed, his habit of regarding Edward's wishes and convenience as of the first importance. However much occupied with her duties as hostess, she always found time to invade his sanctum many times during the twenty-four hours when she was at home, or to leave tokens of her remembrance and thought for his comfort when she was absent. The simple, dull-colored dressing-gown that he wore when she came, was replaced by a tasteful and luxurious one of her selection; and the velvet slippers which suited it so well, she had worked for him herself. She adorned his room with a hundred little feminine ornaments and arrangements it had never known before, and studied his tastes and habits that she might the more easily minister to them. These attentions at first embarrassed more than pleased him; but he soon learned to appreciate them. It must be a frigid misanthrope indeed who can long remain insensible to the melting influence of unaccustomed feminine care.

But Edward, though sensible to this influence, found as the weeks rolled by that a most uncomfortable change had come over the even tenor of his life. Instead of his usual quiet enjoyment, came a feverish restlessness. For the first time since he could remember, books lost their magic to him. He scarcely read at all; but would constantly catch himself listening eagerly for footsteps along the corridor outside his door, and for a melodious laugh which he soon learned to distinguish from the equally musical mirth of his sister Kate. The window of his room, which fronted the lawn, was always open now, and when the gay party of young people took their daily ride or departure from home, his eyes were attracted magnetically to the retiring cavalcade; and bright was the bloom

of his generally pale cheek when his glance singled out the graceful form it sought. He would wander forth when certain that they were gone, and dream dreams, and heave sighs, as every love-lorn youth has done since the world commenced, and will continue to do while it lasts. Or, mounting his horse, ride fast and far, in the vain endeavor to escape the strange sense of blank weariness that haunted him at home. And all this time his constraint and distance of manner towards Blanche Ormond rather increased than diminished.

He did not bear such a state of mind or of heart with a great deal of patience. At first, he tried to jeer himself out of it. What, he, who had so often laughed at Frank's numerous love affairs, he to fall into a more absurd sentimentalism than ever Frank had been guilty of! In love—desperately in love—with a girl with whom he had never exchanged a word! Really, the thing was too preposterous! He must, if he had one grain of sense remaining, give up such stuff immediately. If the inference was to be relied on, he did *not* have one grain of sense, for he did not give it up. Finding this to be the case, he tried reasoning with himself, to as little purpose. Then he suddenly discovered that, after all, it was but imagination. And forthwith, he sat down to his books with an air of mingled resolution and indifference—when, lo! not three sentences, before the azure eyes of Blanche Ormond seemed dancing over the page, and the sheen of her golden locks obscuring the characters.

"This is intolerable!" he exclaimed aloud, shutting the volume with a slam. "I am a fool! an idiot! What can I do to cure myself of this senseless infatuation?"

Travel! yes travel! That would be just the thing.

The physicians had always recommended a sea voyage for his health. He would go to Cuba, or Madeira, or Europe, or the Antipodes. He cared not a straw where he went, so that he escaped the evil eye (for so he began verily to regard it!) that had transfixed his heart. But when he announced his wishes to his father, Mr. Clerville seemed so much pained, and entreated him so earnestly to relinquish the idea, at least until spring, that he was fain to comply, remembering how often he had formerly refused to entertain the thought of a journey. To go now, alone too, would be marking so plainly his anxiety to leave home, and would so surely be attributed to a dislike of his father's marriage, that he even regretted having spoken of it at all to his father. He secretly anathemized his folly, calling himself all sorts of uncomplimentary names. As bad as Frank indeed! Why he was a thousand times worse. Frank's affairs of the heart were always of a very transient duration—his adoration of one pretty face being quickly cured by the sight of another; while Edward groaned as he confessed that there seemed not the least prospect of relief for himself in this way or any other. He actually ventured down stairs one night, when there was a large party, to see if he could not fall in love with some other angel, reflecting that a division of his heart would render both moieties weak, and, therefore, more easily to be overcome. Standing at a safe distance, he contemplated a score or more of the South's lovely daughters; but, alas! though he owned that they were fair, he could as soon have fallen in love with his black mammy as with any one of them, while that azure-eyed and azure-robed damsel Blanche was flitting about continually before his eyes. She was peerless, he thought, as he slowly betook himself back to his solitary chamber.

Only one consolation he possessed: this was, that he had confined the knowledge of his folly to his own breast. No one suspected it, he was sure; not even Blanche herself. There he was mistaken. It takes a wise man and a wary one to conceal his love from the object of it, unless she be so much occupied with some love of her own as to have Cupid's fillet over her eyes. Blanche did suspect it, or she would have taken Kate's advice about speaking to Edward. And this suspicion naturally begat a sort of interest for such a mysterious and silent adorer. But she was extremely careful to confine both her suspicion and her interest to her own private thoughts. Never, of her own accord, did she mention his name, or seem to remember his existence even.

CHAPTER V

DARE-DEVIL.

"Don't you think dinner parties very dull and disagreeable?" said Kate to Blanche, as they rose from luncheon and prepared to follow the example of Lucy, who had the moment before announced her intention of going upstairs to dress.

"That I do!" answered Blanche, with unction. "I wish we did not have to go to this one!"

"I wonder if Mamma would not let us off going?" said Kate, pausing on the first step, as she was about to mount the stairs. "We can ask her anyhow."

They returned into the morning sitting-room, where luncheon was always served, and preferred their petition to Mrs. Clerville. She hesitated.

"But, my dears," she said at last, "I do not think

it would look well, your not going. The Dents are very kind people, and—”

“Oh, but, Mamma, they are so awfully prosy! And this is just a stiff family party! For my part I don’t believe they expected us to go, or will want our company. You know there are no young people there, and it will be dreadful to us to be bored so. Do let us stay at home, Mamma!”

“Yes, do, Mamma!” echoed Blanche.

“Oh!” cried Kate eagerly, clasping her hands and then pointing out the window, “Yonder comes Dare-devil! You surely will not make us leave him to go to that prosy dinner party, now Mamma? Tell Mrs. Dent that Dare-devil had just come, and she will not be surprised at our staying.”

“Dare-devil,” exclaimed Blanche, with equal eagerness.

She sprang to the window and looked out as a horseman halted on the gravel sweep before the house, dismounted, threw his rein with a familiar greeting to a servant who at the moment appeared, and entered the hall with the easy step of a friend.

Kate ran to meet him, followed hard by Blanche.

“Welcome, thrice welcome, truant as you are!” cried Kate, holding out her hands, and shaking both of his. “Here, Blanche, is the redoubtable Dare-devil; of whom I have told you so much—and this is our new sister, Dare.”

“Wild as ever, Katydid. Miss Blanch, I am most happy to make your acquaintance,” he said, shaking her hand with frank courtesy. “Kate and myself are such sworn allies that we always reckon our friends common property.”

“And I have heard so much of Mr. Dare-devil,” replied Blanche, laughingly, “that he seems quite an old friend to me.”

"Come and see Mamma," said Kate, leading the way to the room they had left the moment before. "You must know, Dare, Papa and Mamma are going to a stupid dinner-party to-day, and Blanche and myself were just begging Mamma to let us stay at home. If she will, what a pleasant day we shall have; but if we are obliged to go, I intend to take you along. That will—here, Mamma, here he is at last. Mr. Deville, Mrs. Clerville."

Mr. Clerville entered and welcomed Dare-devil with the greatest cordiality. After the first greetings were over, Mr. Deville, who had more than once glanced expectant towards the open door, enquired for Frank.

"Oh, Frank has become such a man of business, that he has gone to Scarsboro' to see about selling cotton," said Kate. "But, Mamma—" and, resuming her entreaties that they might be permitted to remain at home, Mrs. Clerville consented.

"And does Lucy wish to stay, too?" she asked.

"Of course," answered both the girls at once.

"Then, Mr. Clerville, I think we had better go. I don't know what kind of a dinner Letty will give you all," she added, smiling. "You had better tell Lucy to see to it, dears."

Lucy was just giving the finishing touches to her very becoming toilette, when Kate and Blanche came dancing into the room, after watching their parents drive away.

"Surely you ought to be dressing," she said, turning and observing with surprise that they still wore their simple white morning dresses. "Give me a handkerchief, Anna. I am afraid you will keep Mamma waiting, girls. She was ready long ago."

"But we are not going," cried Blanche. "We are let off the penance of that dismal dinner, and shall have a nice day at home."

Lucy looked as if she half envied them, but only said pleasantly, as she took her bonnet from her maid, and was about to put it on, "I hope you will."

"Never mind putting on your bonnet," said Kate, "for we told Mamma that you would rather stay, too, and she has gone already."

"Has she?" said Lucy, with a smile of relief. "I am very glad. I did not like to say so, but I dreaded the day nearly as much as you did."

"And why not like to say so?" cried Blanche, laughing. "But that's the way always with you self-denying people. You will any time endure purgatorial penance rather than do anything that you think would be the least unpleasant to others. Kate and myself are not such saints. Are we Katydid?"

Blanche pronounced the last words in a very peculiar tone; and Lucy looked up with a half start as she heard it.

"Now, Lulu, as we got you off going, you must return our good offices by ordering a nice dinner for us. Mamma said you must attend to it."

"Very well; but I must change my dress first;" and she began to unclasp her bracelets.

"No, no," exclaimed Blanche, quickly replacing them. "No, no, Lulu—you must do as we tell you. Now come straight down stairs, for we have something to show you there."

The quiet Lucy yielded, thinking that she could soon escape, and return to rid herself of her elaborate dinner costume. It was a rich, amber-colored tissue, trimmed with heavy black lace. She wore on her alabaster-hued neck and arms a cameo set. Her 'long fair hair' was very simply arranged in heavy waved rolls in front, and a massive but classical looking knot low on the neck behind. The two girls playfully seized each a hand and hurried her out of

the room. They stopped a moment at the head of the stair and surveyed her critically; then exchanging a nod and a smile of mischievous meaning, proceeded on their way.

A stalwart gentleman, with very bright dark eyes, very black moustachios and beard, a clear bronzed complexion, features of no particular style, but the *tout ensemble* of which was extremely pleasing and handsome and white teeth that gleamed lustreful through the moustache before mentioned, came instantly to meet them as they descended the stair. He had been standing at the hall door in an attitude of no patient waiting. A stalwart form—but let not the word shock delicate sensibilities. From the crown of his curl-bedecked head to the tip of his unexceptionably small and *tonish* boot; Mr. Dare-devil, as his friend Kate called him, was gentleman indisputably. Though just at the present moment his manner was slightly deficient in gentlemanly ease; for he did not utter a word as he took the hand of the equally silent Lucy. Such a meeting might have been awkward, had not Kate and Blanche removed the awkwardness by taking themselves away; whereupon Mr. Deville, leading Lucy into the drawing-room, regained the power of speech, and exercised the same very unceasingly for some time to come.

Those nymphs of mirth and mischief, Kate and Blanche, ran off to the kitchen.

"Now, Mom Letty," cried Blanche, as they burst in, almost out of breath, "you must get the best dinner you ever cooked in your life—"

"For Lulu's sweat heart!" concluded Kate, suiting her expression to the capacity of her hearer.

"You must have turtle-soup and venison pastry, and—"

"Turkey and ham," chimed in Kate.

"And don't forget some peacock's brains for me," said Blanche.

"And some nightingale's tongue for me," cried Kate.

"And some heart something or other for Lucy and Dare-devil!"

"And some ice-cream for Edward."

"And ever so many good things for Frank, dear fellow."

"I tell you what the heart something or other can be," cried Kate, laughing. "Some jelly moulded in heart shape. Nothing else is ethereal enough for lovers."

Here the cook held up her hands in despair at such an avalanche of words, and, obtaining a moment's silence, expressed her conviction that they were trying to fool their old Mammy. "You know Mistis told me there was no dinner to be got to-day, ceptin' for Mars Edward, and he never eats anything, cause you was all the rest of you goin' out to dinner."

"Yes, but we changed our minds and didn't go. Here we are, you see, and Papa and Mamma are gone long ago, and Lucy and Dare-devil are in the house, too."

"And Frank has only gone to Scarsboro'. He will be back directly. So you must have a real nice dinner, Mom Letty. Hear now?" And Kate gave the fat arm of the old woman a slight shake to enforce attention.

Letty both heard and heeded, but she thought fit to make some affected demurs to the suggestions still pressed upon her by the laughing girls; and when finally, to the vast amusement of Jack the scullion, they proposed to elect themselves her assistants in the culinary processes, she fairly took them each by one arm and led them to the door.

"Shame on you to treat us so!" They cried, with pretended indignation. "Never mind! we won't eat one bit of your old dinner!"

They ran into the house.

"Kate," exclaimed Blanche, suddenly, "I tell you what we can do. You know there never has been an opportunity for you to show me your mother's portrait. Come on now. I do so want to see it."

"Yes, is it not strange," said Kate, as they proceeded to Mr. Clerville's private room—"is it not strange that whenever one wants to do a thing without everybody's knowing it, they never can find an opportunity."

They approached the escritoire as she spoke, and opening the doors, the beautiful shade looked down upon them.

They stood for a long time, their arms clasped around each other's waists, looking silently at it; their wild mood hushed in presence of that face—all that remained of the life that was gone.

"Do you think any of us resemble it?" said Kate at last, in a low tone.

"Scarcely at all," answered Blanche.

"Why, Edward is generally thought to be the image of Mamma. I can see a great likeness in him to this portrait myself."

"Oh! yes; *he* does look like it; but I was thinking of Lucy and yourself. There is a slight family resemblance in all of you, but not striking. I think," she added musingly, still looking at the picture, "it is the loveliest face I ever saw in my life."

"I have always heard that she was very beautiful," said Kate.

"Do you know, Kate," said Blanche, turning round and looking very grave, "do you know I cannot help wondering how it is that people can marry twice!

The idea of uttering again and to another the very same vows they made the first time! I should think it would seem to them a perjury! For instance, how could papa look at this portrait and want to take another wife?"

"But she has been dead so many years," said Kate. "I cannot remember her at all. Papa remained constant to her memory a very long time. I never had an idea he would marry again."

"And I was perfectly astounded when Mamma told me that she was going to get married. I really thought at first that she was jesting."

"I know that Papa felt dreadfully shy about telling us; particularly when Mr. Edward looked so glum at him. "What did Mamma say, Blanche, and how did you like the idea?"

"I don't know whether Mamma felt shy about telling me," answered Blanche, laughing; "but I expect she did, for she chose the dusk of the evening to make the communication, and she cried a little. She said she had never thought of marrying before, but that she had often been troubled in reflecting that if she should die before I married, I would be in a very sad, unprotected position. She has very few relations, and there is not one of them she would like me to be with; so that when Mr. Clerville proposed, she thought it would be best, on my account, to accept him. Her friends all told her it would be a very prudent match."

Kate laughed.

"It certainly was anything but a romantic match on either side," she said, "for Papa professed to act merely from a sense of duty—and Mamma the same, it seems. And only think how nicely it has turned out! I am sure we ought to be very much obliged to them."

"That we ought, and that I am. But I didn't like the idea much at first, I confess."

"You were like Edward. He thought mamma herself would do well enough—or, I mean it would do for papa to marry her, but for the young lady, her daughter, as he called you. He was sure that we should get to quarrelling—Lulu and you and myself."

Both the girls laughed merrily at the idea.

"So that is the reason he dislikes me, is it?" said Blanche, coloring a little. "I hope you will tell him some time, Kate, that we never have quarrelled once."

"And never shall!" rejoined Kate, kissing her.

"I thought it would be the strangest thing to see Mamma married," observed Blanche. "I could not imagine her as any other than a widow. And yet now it seems the most natural thing in the world. Don't it?"

"Yes. One would really think she and Papa had been married to each other all their lives. Do you remember your father?"

"Oh! no. He died when I was only a few months old. When I can first remember, Mamma was in deep mourning, and always looked very sad. She wore black until her health became so wretched she was obliged to take it off. Papa was a naval officer, you know. A very malignant fever broke out on board his vessel while cruising in the Mediterranean, and a great many of her officers and men died: Papa among the number. They were all buried at sea, and this nearly killed Mamma. I collected her fainting one night, when some one sang '*The Ocean Grave*.' I was about ten years old, and I never shall forget how frightened I was."

"*The Ocean Grave*," cried Kate, eagerly. "I never heard it but once, and I have tried dozens of times

since to get the notes, but never succeeded. I thought it exquisitely beautiful. Do you know it?"

"Yes, I can teach it to you—only we must never sing it before Mamma. I don't think the words very fine, but the music is really beautiful, as you say."

"Come and sing it for me now," said Kate. "The guitar is up-stairs, so we need not disturb those whispering lovers in the drawing-room. Come, darling."

Closing the *escritoire* and windows they left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

A COMPACT.

If Letty omitted a few of the items of the bill of fare given her by Kate and Blanche, the dinner which appeared certainly deserved more consideration than was paid to it by Mr. Deville and Miss Clerville. They were neither hungry nor communicative, it seemed. So far as they were concerned, the meal passed in almost perfect silence. Edward was always silent; so that the conversation devolved entirely upon Kate and Blanche. They were ably seconded by Frank, who, however, did not arrive until dinner was half over.

When dessert was placed on the table, great was the amusement of Kate and Blanche to see that Letty had followed their directions literally. There was the sparkling mould of amber-colored jelly; the tempting pyramid of ice-cream; with fruits, cakes, confectionery, etc., which might pass for the "good things" intended for Frank.

"You must know, good people," cried Kate, "that Blanche and myself ordered this dessert, to suit the

appetites of all the company. Now select, and see if we judged correctly of your tastes."

"Give me some ice-cream, pet," said Frank. "Having just been riding in the sun, I can appreciate it properly."

"And what will you take, Dare?" queried Kate, after helping Frank.

He looked over the table with an air of consideration.

"Do you mean that, like the dishes in *Retaliation*, our tastes are to be taken as indications of character?" he asked.

"No, not exactly that—or yes. Of character or of state of mind."

"We must be very careful, then, in our choice," said he.

Finally he helped himself to some jelly. Kate was on the point of clapping her hands, but a warning look from Blanche restrained her until Lucy had also taken jelly. Edward followed their example.

"Well, and have we justified your opinion of our tastes?" said Dare-devil.

"You and Lucy have, but Edward has disappointed us. We knew there was nothing ethereal enough for you two but jelly; and did you notice the shape of it, too? The ice-cream was intended for Edward."

"And why ice-cream for Edward?" inquired Dare-devil, to conceal his own and Lucy's embarrassment.

"Oh, because he is so cold. Blanche ordered all sorts of good things for 'Frank, the dear fellow;' and he has not touched them—has patronised Edward's ice-cream. A shame, Frank."

Edward glanced at Blanche, and, as it always happened when he looked at her and caught her eye, both of them blushed. He wondered whether it was

she who ordered the ice-cream for him—if she thought him cold.

“And what did you intend for yourselves?” enquired Frank.

“Alas,” said Kate, “we aspired to epicurean delicacies beyond the ken of Mom Letty. Blanche ordered peacock’s brains, and, just to keep her in countenance, I chose nightingales’ tongues.”

“I hope you do not mean to eschew all less imperial viands,” said Frank. “This ice-cream is very good; take some.”

“Thank you, no,” said Blanche; “I prefer an orange.”

“And I will take a piece of jelly-cake,” said Kate. “Let me give you some, Dare.”

He took it in his plate, but left it untouched.

“Kate,” he whispered, as they were all leaving the dining-room, “come with me into the conservatory a moment.”

“Well,” exclaimed Kate, when they had reached the conservatory, and she had waited just a quarter of a second without his speaking; “well, Mr. Dare-devil, what did you want with me?”

“My sister Kate, now,” he said, bending and pressing his lips to her forehead.

“I suppose I must congratulate you!” she exclaimed, half laughing and half crying, as she gave him a very sisterly embrace in return; “though, now I think of it, I ought to be in despair at your perfidy. You faithless creature! What has become of all your vows of devotion to me?”

“I will find you another lover more worthy your perfections.” But, Katydid, I want you to add your persuasions to mine to induce Lucy to go with me to Cuba next month. Will you not?”

Kate’s great dark eyes opened wonderingly.

"What do you mean? Are you going to Cuba next month?"

"Yes. I thought I told you in my last letter that Amanda is increasingly ill, and as Harry cannot possibly leave home just now, I promised him that I would take her to Cuba."

"Why cannot your brother leave home?"

"He has several very important cases that will come on just at that time; and he is equally unwilling to leave them, or to let his wife remain that much longer. So I am to take her over and remain with her until he can go: and—"

"You want to carry off Lucy! No indeed, I will not help you to persuade her to go. To leave me, Dare! I have been laughing very much, and thinking it very funny, you and Lucy being in love with each other, but when it comes to her actually going away, I don't feel the least like laughing. I am afraid—"

Her voice faltered, and she stopped short.

"Why you know, dear Kate," said Deville, kindly, "that if I did not take her from you, somebody else would, and I am sure you would rather give her to your friend Dare than to any one else, would you not?"

"Oh, yes; I suppose so," she answered, smiling through the tears which had sprung to her eyes; "but this is the first time I ever fully realized the idea of actual separation from Lucy; and you don't know how dreadful it seems to me, Dare."

"Let there be no separation, then. You have not been living at home for years until within a very few months past, and your father, particularly now that he is married, will not miss you. Live with us."

"I am afraid that arrangement will never do," she

replied, laughing, "for then, you see, I should have to give up Frank and Blanche, as well as Papa and Mamma. You know I wrote you how good Mamma is. No," she continued, with a sigh, "I shall have to resign myself to dear Lulu's leaving me. But if you do not make her happy, sir," she turned to him with a look of playful menace, "why—"

"I shall deserve to be hanged, drawn and quartered, and will agree to suffer that penalty."

"And I promise to inflict it," said Kate.

"You speak of Frank and Blanche," pursued Deville. "Do you not think they will soon follow the example of Lucy and myself?"

"No," answered Kate, laughing. "What could have put such an idea into your head? They are just about as likely to fall in love with each other as you and I were."

"Lucy thinks they will marry each other. Not immediately, perhaps, but eventually."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Kate; "how can she think so? She is entirely mistaken."

"I think myself, judging from their manner, that they have no such thought at present—but it is very possible that they may have hereafter."

"I hope so—but I do not expect it."

"For Edward's sake, I hope not."

"Edward's sake!" Kate repeated, staring. "Why what on earth can Edward possibly have to do with it?"

"Simply that *he* is not insensible to the charms of his pretty step-sister, if Frank is. And a love affair would be a much more serious matter with him than with Frank."

"*Edward!*" exclaimed Kate, bursting into an immoderate fit of laughter; "why they never speak to each other! Edward never even looks at her. Indeed he

has acted almost rudely about it; we all felt really mortified by his coldness to her. Edward in "love with Blanche!" she repeated, her amusement increasing, as the full ludicrousness of the thing struck her more and more forcibly: "Oh, my dear Dare, what an imagination you have got! Or is it because you are in love yourself that you think everybody else must be in the same predicament? I mean to tell them both about it, for it is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard in my life."

She started to run out of the conservatory, but Deville catching her hand and detaining her, entreated that she would not mention his ridiculous conjecture to any one at all.

"Oh, but I must!" she cried. "It is too funny! I must at least tell Blanche."

"Pray do not," said Dare earnestly. "If my conjecture is correct, any notice will only increase their embarrassment—"

"But it is not correct, I tell you! It is ridiculous!"

"Then why say anything about it? My dear Kate I must beg you seriously—"

"Well, well," interrupted Kate, "if you come to serious seriousness, I will not mention it; but I do think you might let me tell Blanche."

"No," answered he, as they went back to the drawing-room. "And I am not to count on your help in persuading Lucy to abridge the time which is to elapse before I am made happy?" he asked reproachfully.

Kate shook her head.

"You ought to think it very good of me to give my consent at all. What does she say about going to Cuba?"

"She would not consent to it."

"No wonder. Can you not understand, Mr. Dare-

devil, that a woman must have some time to get used to the idea of leaving her family and home?"

They were at the drawing-room door, and Kate, leaving Deville to enter alone, ran off to find Lucy, a glance into the room having shown her that her sister was not there.

Edward was there—for a wonder. Probably he made this variation from his usual habit, in compliment to Mr. Deville. But the latter did not take the compliment to himself. He threw himself in a lounging attitude on one end of the sofa, opposite to which Blanche was sitting at the harp. Edward rose from his seat on the other side of the room, and drawing forward a large arm chair, joined him, and began to talk. Deville's dark eyes glittered with suppressed mirth as he noticed how constantly Edward's glance rested on the group opposite; Blanche, Frank, and the harp. Blanche always looked particularly well when placed at this graceful instrument; and any one might have been pardoned for regarding with pleasure the picture she now formed. Her beautiful profile and long golden curls were clearly defined against the curtain just behind her; her exquisite bust thrown slightly forward; the white rounded arms extended over the strings. And then she was so exactly in front of Edward that he would have been compelled to turn his face aside if he had *not* looked at her.

Deville had a *modicum* of Kate's love of mischief in his composition, and he resolved to apply a little touchstone to Edward's feelings. Accordingly he informed him of his own acceptance by Lucy, claiming his fraternal congratulations thereupon; and Edward having very cordially shaken his hand, and expressed his pleasure at the prospect of his contemplated connection, Deville remarked, with a slight motion of the hand towards the pair before them.

"What do you think of the prospect of a matrimonial affair in that quarter, Edward?"

The paleness that instantly overspread Edward's face was proof sufficient to Dare of the truth of his suspicion. He instantly resolved, however, to hold his tongue on the subject, and, sorry to perceive how much pain his remark had caused, he added,

"I suggested the idea to Kate; but she laughed at it. Seemed to think it quite absurd."

Edward's face cleared a little at this; and though he did not answer Deville's remarks, he talked on, of indifferent subjects.

A few minutes afterwards Lucy and Kate came in. Kate joined Blanche and Frank, and Lucy accepted with a blush Mr. Deville's earnest proffer of a part of his sofa. Any one else but Edward would have left the vicinity of the sofa thus occupied; but it never occurred to his innocent mind that he might be *de trop*: It is true his presence did not greatly interfere with their *tete-a-tete*, since Lucy and Deville both saw that he was obviously as unconscious and unobservant of what they were saying, as if he had been both blind and deaf. He presently rose and left the room.

As soon as Mr. Clerville returned that evening, Dare Deville asked and obtained a private interview; and after having been closeted for a very brief time with the *pater familias*, he emerged from the library a superlatively happy man; for not only had Mr. Clerville been perfectly propitious to his suit, (which, indeed, was no more than he had expected,) but, as Dare-devil thought, with the greatest consideration, had assured him that if Lucy consented to an immediate marriage, he consented also. Mr. Deville betook himself to laboring this point with the young lady immediately. But his labor was vain. She was truly ingenious in devising excuses and objections.

She must positively, as Kate had said, have some time to accustom herself to the idea of leaving her family. And then, though her father *had* consented, she knew he would prefer a longer delay. He had several times expressed the wish that his children should remain with him, all together for a few months, at least. And—last and most potent objection—how could she possibly be ready in such a short time! Gentlemen, she assured Mr. Deville, had not the least conception of the labor required in getting up a *trousseau*. Six months was the very shortest time in which she could undertake to fit out for such a long voyage as that of matrimony. Instead of the fifth of November, as he proposed, the fifth of April should be her wedding day.

Mr. Deville was obliged to submit: and he did so with just tolerable grace only.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ADVENTURE.

Dare-devil's visit of a fortnight was over, and Frank had accompanied him as far as Scarsborough, on his departure. Kate and Blanche walked out in the afternoon to meet Frank as he was returning. Their path lay through a pretty wood, that was intersected midway by a river, which held within its chrystal arms a beautiful, picturesque little island. Frank and Edward had been accustomed in their boyhood to navigate this stream in a small boat of very primitive construction, the chief recommendation of which was its lightness. It was still used occasionally by the negroes, when they preferred fishing in the middle of the river, to casting in their lines at the bank: and

was fastened by a long, stout chain, to a stake driven firmly into the ground.

"Suppose we get in the boat, and go across to the island?" said Kate. "Frank has often taken me over, to get muskadines and grapes. There are so many vines there. Is it not a beautiful place?"

"Beautiful!" answered Blanche. "I should like very much to go, though it is now too late for muscadines and grapes. But I am afraid we could not manage the canoe. Just think of our sailing off down stream. We"—

"Oh!" interrupted Kate, "I am sure we can manage it. It is as light as possible. See; we can try first without unchaining it. You take that pole. There—I told you so," she exclaimed in triumph, as, by their united efforts, they propelled the little dug-out up stream as far as the chain would admit of its going. "Now we will push up close to the bank and unloose it," continued Kate, bending with all her strength against the pole she held.

"I am almost afraid," said Blanche, doubtfully. "Do you really think that if we unchain it, it will not run away with us?"

"Why, I am sure it can't. Why should not we row a boat as well as Ellen Douglas did? And Loch Katrine is much larger and deeper than this little river!"

"Ellen Douglas," cried Blanche, laughing. "I think that is scarcely a case in point. Authors can make their heroines do anything."

"Well, but Elizabeth Smith and her sisters really did row about over—what was the name of the lake? I forget. But never mind it. I know we can pole this canoe—and I mean to try; that is, if you are not really afraid."

"Oh! no. I have a great fancy for the idea—only

"I thought I ought to parade a little prudence first," answered Blanche, laughing.

They pushed the canoe close to the bank—and after tugging until their delicate hands had exchanged the hue of the lily for that of the rose, they succeeded in drawing the heavy iron ring from over the stake. Dropping the clattering length of chain into the bottom of the boat, they pushed with all their might; but, at first, to no purpose. The dug-out seemed likely to verify Blanche's suggestion, and float with them down the stream. Half laughing, half frightened, they found themselves receding from the landing place, without approaching the island.

"Oh!" exclaimed Kate, suddenly, "we ought to head our boat up stream. That is the reason we are not going right. Put your pole in on this side, Blanche; you were pushing us down the current."

"How learnedly you speak," said Blanche; but you were right, I declare. This is really delightful. We must come on the river often. Frank shall have us a summer-house made on the island—and what charming times we shall have—won't we?"

"Take care," cried Kate, warningly. "We are approaching the bank. Steady there," she exclaimed, with affected gravity. "Now—"

Thump went the boat, giving them such a rude jostle as almost to upset their equilibrium. Laughing and glowing with the unaccustomed and violent exertion they had been making, they lifted the chain, and sprang upon the bank.

"How are we to fasten the boat now?" said Blanche. "There is no stake here."

"Wrap the chain around this little tree."

"But how can we fasten it so that it will not unloose itself?"

They looked around, and Blanche picked up a stick,

"I think we can make it fast with this," she said. Having wound the chain several times about the trunk of a slender tree on the margin of the water, they passed the stick through the iron ring and one link of the chain, thus holding the two together quite securely.

"How clever we are!" they both exclaimed—and by this time quite wearied out, sat themselves on a soft cushion of moss to rest.

"I wonder what Frank will say when he comes and finds us here?" said Kate.

"What *will* he say, sure enough," answered Blanche. "I have an idea he will not think it as amusing as we do. Indeed, Katydid, I expect we shall get two scoldings for coming here—one from Frank, and the other from Mamma."

"Do you think so? Then we had better return as speedily as possible. But I am so tired. We must rest a little first. My arms really ache. Don't yours?"

"Yes—yonder comes Glencoe."

As she spoke Frank's great Newfoundland dog emerged from the bushes on the other side the river, and plunging into the water, swam over to the island.

"If we should be in danger of drowning, he can save us," said Kate, laughing. "What a fright you are, Glencoe," she continued, as he ran up to them, all dripping—his usually silken curls clinging wet and sleek to his sides. They both sprang to their feet and retreated in haste, to avoid the shower of water he was preparing to shake off.

The island was only a few hundred yards in length, but so covered with trees and undergrowth, that as they commenced exploring its shady nooks, they lost sight of the boat and their landing place. A crushing among the bushes presently announced the approach of the dog, who came bounding towards them.

holding in his mouth a piece of stick, which he laid at their feet with the air of one who had performed some most commendable act, and expected to be applauded accordingly. The two girls exchanged a glance of alarm, as they thought they recognized the stick as the one with which they had secured their boat. Running as rapidly as the tangled brushwood permitted, they reached the place where they had left the canoe, only in time to see that faithless little craft floating hastily down the stream; it having already turned the point of the island, and found the mid-current of the river. After the first momentary glance of consternation, they laughed heartily at their predicament.

"He must have pulled the stick out of the chain," said Blanche.

"Of course he did. He never sees a stick without seizing it with his teeth, and pulling till he obtains possession of it."

"Glenco, Glenco, thou little knowest the mischief thou hast done!" said Blanche to the dog, who still stood before them, wagging his tail, and waiting for the praise he knew he deserved so well. "How are we to get back, Kate?"

"We shall have to wait until somebody comes to hunt for us. Frank will be sure to come the moment he gets home and finds that we are missing."

"But he will never think of our being here. If we should have to stay all night it will be quite an adventure."

"Oh! we shall be missed and searched for."

"But if they do not find us?"

"We can build a fire when it grows dark, and they will be sure to see the light."

"Build a fire! And where are we to get the fire?"

"Bless me, I never thought of that," said Kate,

"but yes we can, though. By rubbing two dry pieces of wood together, they will ignite. You know people who are ship-wrecked always make fires in that way."

"I doubt whether we shall find any very dry wood here," said Blanche, looking about. "And I very much doubt whether we could rub it hard enough to make it ignite, if we did find it."

"Rather than stay here all night, and frighten them all to death—for they would be certain to think we were drowned—we will have to wade out, I suppose," said Kate. "The river is narrow here, and quite deep; but a hundred yards further up, just at the point of the island, it is broad, and very shallow—scarcely more than two feet deep, I think; and there are a great many rocks all the way across. Perhaps we might be able to get over by stepping on them. We can go and see."

With incredible difficulty they made their way through the pathless wilderness of brushwood, and finally, after two or three false alarms about snakes and scorpions, reached the part of the bank of which Kate had spoken. The river was spread out before them wide and shallow, with many rocks showing themselves above the surface. But, unfortunately, these rocks, though they would have made convenient stepping-stones for a giant, were too far apart to admit of their springing from one to the other.

"There is no help for it," said Kate. "We shall have to wait until some one sees us. I am glad we came here, as it is nearer home. Yonder is the road, and we can see everybody that passes. And here is a nice seat. Oh! we can wait. It is not near sun-down yet."

They sat down again, and watched the road assiduously for some time; but no one appeared, and no way of getting out of their dilemma presented

itself. An hour had elapsed, and they were becoming quite uncomfortable as to their situation, when they perceived a figure moving slowly along at a distance. As it was almost dark, they could only see that it was a man—could not tell who it was.

"Shall I call?" said Kate. "I really am ashamed, it seems so ridiculous, our being here. But it is getting so late!"

"How will you call?" said Blanche. "I wonder who that is?"

"I'll call Frank, and whoever it is must hear, and will come, of course."

She called several times, as loudly as she could, "Frank, Frank!"

The person in the distance turned and listened a moment, looking around, but, not seeing any one, was about to move on, when they both called together, "Frank, Frank, do come to us—we want you!"

"Where are you?" inquired a voice, which they recognized as Edward's.

"Here—on the Island," answered Kate.

"Oh! Kate, how sorry I am that you called! I had no idea it was—*him*. Do—"

"Never mind—he can tell us what to do," answered Kate.

"Let us go to meet him," said Blanche eagerly; "we might as well—"

"No, no!" exclaimed Kate, catching her arm as she was about to step into the water, "indeed you must not, Blanche. Edward can send another boat."

"What is the matter?" demanded Edward, as he now came hurrying up, almost out of breath.

Kate explained in few words, and asked if he could get another boat.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, in a tone of such absolute terror that they were both struck fully for

the first time with a sense of the danger they had incurred. "Is it possible you crossed the river alone in that cockle-shell of a canoe?"

The next moment they heard a splash, and the next saw Edward striding rapidly towards them through the water. It was a pair of very startled and frightened faces that greeted him through the gloom of the falling evening, as he stepped upon the bank.

"Oh! Edward, what have you done?" cried Kate, when she had recovered from the consternation sufficiently to speak. "You will take another violent cold, getting wet in this way. Why did you come?"

"There is not another boat on the plantation," he replied, and it would take hours to procure one. "I will carry you over."

He approached Blanche as he spoke, congratulating himself mentally that the deepening twilight concealed the fiery glow which he felt upon his face. She drew back hastily, exclaiming, "No, no--thank you! but I am sure we can walk over, as I told Kate."

"Impossible!" he answered quietly. "The current is much stronger than it looks. You could not sustain yourself against it. You need not fear but that I will carry you quite safely," he added, seeing that she still hesitated.

"It was not that," answered Blanche quickly. "I—I—"

"It is becoming late, and will soon be quite dark," said Edward. "My mother, I am sure, will be very uneasy. Pray permit me."

Without waiting the permission he asked, he lifted her in his arms, and, carefully adjusting her dress so that it should not get wet, stepped into the river. For the first moment or two he trembled so excessively that Blanche really did feel the alarm of which she

had not, in her first embarrassment, once thought. But his clasp grew steady after a few steps brought him into the deeper water and full sweep of the current. He walked slowly, and with great care, though evidently without the slightest sense of timidity. Relieved of her momentary apprehension, Blanche had time to reflect on the singularity of her position, with intense chagrin and confusion. For a mere childish, and, as she now saw, most imprudent freak, she had endangered her life, and placed herself under obligations to Edward. "Oh, that it had been Frank!" she exclaimed, mentally. But Edward! Edward, who always avoided her so pertinaciously—who evidently disliked her!—and for no earthly reason, too! It was *too* vexatious! Her conscience began to make a protest. Did Edward really dislike her? In the very secret chambers of her heart she had some doubt of the fact, though she chose to affect to believe so, not only to Kate, but to herself. Edward was not alone in blessing the twilight shades that proved so kind a veil to the flush of his cheek and the light of his eye. Blanche felt equally grateful that her embarrassment was thus concealed. Edward placed her on the bank of the river without a word, and turning, retraced his steps to where his sister remained. Without ceremony or tremor he bore her across the river, walking this time with a rapid, unflinching step.

As they turned in the direction of home, Frank came out to meet them. "Where have you been, to remain out so late? But Edward is with you. I thought you were alone," he said.

"Now, Frank, you must not go to exclaiming, and being horrified, when we tell you where we have been, and what we have been doing," said Kate. "Will you promise?"

"No, petting—you know I never make promises blindfold. But trust to my indulgence, and let me hear at once what unpardonable mischief you have been engaged in."

Kate related in detail the adventure, saying, in conclusion, "You see we were not so much to blame, after all. That bad dog of yours is the real culprit."

"I will give him a sound kicking on sight," said Frank; "but, pardon me, not to blame! I assure you I do not consider it a matter to be jested upon." He spoke seriously. "You did nothing less than endanger your lives by such inconsiderate rashness. I hope you will never be guilty of such an imprudence again. Just think!" and, warming as he proceeded, he was going on with what Kate had a peculiar horror of—a regular fraternal lecture.

She stopped him. "For mercy's sake, Frank, don't look so solemn and talk so gravely. At least, I suppose you are looking solemn; it is so dark I can't see your face."

"I wish most heartily that we had not gone boating," said Blanche, speaking for the first time; "but we never thought of Glenco's attachment to sticks when we left the canoe at his mercy."

"How did you get over the river at last?" inquired Frank.

"Edward carried us over," answered Kate; "and I am dreadfully afraid he will take cold from getting his feet so wet. We must walk faster—and, Edward, you ought to hurry and change your dress immediately."

"You are wasting a great deal of unnecessary thought about my taking cold," he replied. "There is not the slightest danger of it."

"But why in the world did you not send for horses for them to ride over—the ford there is excellent—

instead of going in the water yourself?" asked Frank, with surprise.

"Really, I never thought of that expedient—simple as it seems," answered Edward, with a slight laugh, "But I am not sure that I should have adopted it, had it occurred to my mind. It is some distance from the river to the house, and would have taken so long to get horses there, that, on the whole, I think my first impulse was both the quickest and best."

CHAPTER VIII.

A GOBLET OF NECTAR.

They approached the house as he said this, and found that Mr. and Mrs. Clerville, and Lucy, though not exactly alarmed, were a little anxious about their absence. Mrs. Clerville had despatched three messengers to ascertain their whereabouts,

and had sent her maid, who merits a reprimand, to find out what had happened. Frank, as they entered the drawing-room, said to her, "Unless that if, and hasten their return."

"Here are two young ladies, mother, who merit a reprimand, I assure you," said Frank, as they entered the drawing-room. "Indeed, I must consider you on consideration, you conclude to set them up on seats without backs, for the rest of the evening, I shall not think you unjustly severe."

"Why what can they have been doing, to excite your virtuous candor into giving such strong evidence against them?" asked Mrs. Clerville, laughing.

"What do you think of their getting into a miserable little leaky canoe, and crossing the river to the Island; then fastening the boat so insecurely that it floated down stream, leaving the girls and the

Mrs. Clerville and Lucy looked aghast: Mr. Clerville half surprised, half amused.

"It was very wrong in us," said Blanche, "but—"

"It was my fault entirely," interrupted Kate. "Blanche did not want to go, but I persuaded her there was no danger. And I am sure there was not. At least not as much as you think. And I beg your pardon, Mr. Frank, but our canoe was *not* leaky. If it had not been for Glenco, we should have gotten back in good time, and without the least difficulty."

"How *did* you get back, if the canoe floated off?" asked Mr. Clerville.

"I called Edward, who happened to be passing, and he carried us over."

"Edward went into the water?" exclaimed Mrs. Clerville, looking grave and alarmed. "Really, my dears, I think Frank very right in his judgment of your imprudence! Think what an injury this may be to Edward's health! Did he get wet? Where is he?" she added, looking round.

"Gone to change his dress, I suppose," said Frank.

"Was he much wet?" repeated Mrs. Clerville.

"As well as I could see in the dark he was wet above the knees."

Mrs. Clerville said not another word, but looked very uneasy as she hurried out of the room. Mr. Clerville, too, looked a little anxious, but seeing the distress of the two girls—Blanche especially—he tried to re-assure them by the prediction that Edward would suffer no ill effects from his cold bath. "See, here he comes now," he observed—"and looking all the better for the wetting he has got. My dear boy," he continued turning to Edward, "you will have to come and defend your sisters from Frank's and your mother's indignation. They both seem inclined to be

rather excited on the subject of your exposure to taking cold."

"I should be very much mortified, as well as annoyed," said Edward, coloring and glancing reproachfully at Frank, "if such a trifle is to be seriously spoken of. Surely I am not so ridiculously effeminate that my health must always be talked of as if I was a sick girl?"

"Excuse me," answered Frank, smiling—"but if my father will recollect, I said nothing whatever about your taking cold. I was thinking of their running into danger so recklessly. If I valued their precious lives less," he added, smiling, "I should have been less inclined to censure them. And now, having made the amende honorable——"

"Amende honorable, indeed!" said Kate. "Would you believe, Edward, he was so ungallant as to advise Mamma to scold us severely?"

"Scold you? I deny that I used any such womanish word. I said 'reprimand.'"

"And what is the difference, pray, in the meaning of the two words? I see none, I am sure. Do you, Papa?"

"Not much, I confess."

"You have not studied the niceties of expression, then," said Frank. "There is the same difference between the words, as there is between a gentleman and a ploughman, or a lady and a milk maid."

"Mrs. Clerville just then appeared, bearing a steaming and odorous beverage which she had been concocting for Edward. It required no small effort of self-control in Lucy, Kate and Blanche to refrain from laughing outright at Edward's face, as, after in vain disclaiming all need of it, and making several efforts to avoid swallowing the unwelcome potion, he received the goblet, and hastily quaffed its contents; very

much as if it had been a nauseous medicine, instead of the nectar like preparation of wine and spices it in reality was.

The servant announced tea as he finished his enforced draught—a diversion of the general attention of which he was very glad. Kate's exercise of the afternoon had given her an appetite—while Blanche, on the contrary, had none. And she was so unusually silent during the remainder of the evening, that being several times rallied about it, she confessed she was very tired, and rose to retire.

"Well, my pets," said Frank, as he and Kate were about to leave the room, after a general good night—"you think I have been rather hard with you, so give me a good night kiss in token of forgiveness and amity."

He kissed each on the cheek—receiving a twitch of his curls in return.

"My head ought to be very insensible—on the outside at least," said he—"for I never approach either of these young ladies without having my hair cruelly pulled. Lucy never treats me so badly."

"That is because you treat her respectfully," answered they—"while you consider us children, who may be lectured or kissed, as you please."

"I think," said Mr. Clerville, smiling, "that Edward is entitled to any spare kisses to-night, much more than yourself, Frank."

Kate started towards Edward to carry out her father's suggestion—but an appealing look from Blanche stopped her. She laughed and walked on, saying to her father as she went, "Edward would not thank us for our kisses, I am sure, Papa—and favors must be sought before they are granted. We will not press ours on him."

"Oh Kate!" exclaimed Blanche, as soon as they

had gained their chamber—"Oh Kate, I am so sorry we went on the river this afternoon! I would not for anything in the world that it had happened! What *am* I to do in the morning? It will be very rude not to ask your brother how he is—and how am I to speak to him? I never even thanked him at the time—for he set me down so suddenly, and hurried away so fast, that I did not think of it until afterwards—and then did not know what to say."

"Did not know what to say!" repeated Kate. "I don't see that there was the least need of your thanking him formally—but it seems funny the idea of your being at a loss what to say to any one. You who are usually so easy to all. Just go up to him in the morning, hold on your hand, smile and say—"How are you this morning, Edward? I hope you have not suffered from your exertions on our behalf." That would not be so terribly difficult, I am sure. I always told you that one of your winning, witching smiles would be irresistible to him, as they are to every one else."

"You know I can't do this," said Blanche, disconsolately.

"Well, never mind about it now, I am going to bed and to sleep—for I am tired enough; and I advise you to follow my example. We can manage, I dare say, somehow, to prevent the awkwardness you dread so much."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE LIBRARY

Blanche's fair-face resumed the crimson hue it had worn the night before, when Edward appeared at

breakfast rather late the next morning, and was met by a universal inquiry from all present as to his health. Mrs. Clerville had already satisfied her solicitude on that point by sending, to inquire as soon as he was awake; but she now amplified her questions so much, that he blushed almost as deeply as Blanche did; and the resemblance of expression in the two embarrassed faces was so striking, that several coffee cups were put in requisition to hide behind their friendly cover, the covert smiles that would otherwise have been observed by the objects of them.

Kate drew Blanche into the library after breakfast, and proposed looking over some huge books of engravings that had been the favorite studies of her childhood; and soon becoming interested in the pictures, some of which possessed much artistic merit, while others were amusingly grotesque, Blanche quite forgot that she was risking what she most wished to avoid—a meeting with Edward. Kate was by no means equally oblivious of the fact that Edward generally came into the library after the morning ride, which his father insisted on his punctually taking, to find books which he then carried to his own room; often remaining, if the library was unoccupied. She waited impatiently, and was gratified by his appearance at last. He came in, walking slowly, and reading, as he walked, from a book he held in his hand. Laying it open on the table, he turned to the shelves to search for some other volume.

“Do come here and tell us what this picture is, Edward,” said Kate, so suddenly that he started and looked around in consternation, not having been aware of their presence before. Mechanically he walked across the room to where they sat, by a table on which was spread the huge folio of engravings. He bent over it, as much to conceal his embarrass-

ment as to examine the picture. Kate seized the propitious moment—entirely regardless of the shock she was about to inflict. By the exercise of some little dexterity, she succeeded in placing Edward in a standing posture exactly in front of Blanche—who was thus completely hedged in, on the one side by Edward's person, and on the other by the table. Taking hold of Edward's arm, to prevent retreat on his part, Kate said solemnly—"I have assembled you together this morning, my friends"—both started and looked at her in utter amazement—but she went on with exemplary gravity, though the sparkling mischief of the dark eye, and a mirthful quiver about the lips, were not in the best harmony with her tone—"I say I have managed to get you together at last, to remonstrate seriously with you on the absurdity of your manner to each other. No, no, Edward, do—don't go!" she proceeded rapidly—dropping her serio-comic tone for her natural manner—"Pray listen to me!" •And she held him with both hands so fast that he would have been compelled to exert no small amount of rude strength to disengage himself from her clasp—being which, he remained passive. Blanche never thought of moving—but sat dumb and aghast, while Kate went on, saying—"What is the reason you are always blushing and shying at each other as you do? Where is the sense of it? I assure you, Blanche, that Edward is not an ogre, though I really believe you think he is! And, Edward, trust me, Blanche is no fairy? You are both harmless human beings; formidable only to each other. Now I have broken the ice for you, and do pray, like rational creatures, shake hands and be friends as you ought to. I will leave you to make acquaintance at your leisure."

She suddenly ran across the room, quick as thought opened the door, sprang through, shut and locked it;

all before either Edward or Blanche had relaxed one muscle from the attitudes in which they had been listening to her.

The click of the lock broke the spell that was upon both, and Blanche was about to rise precipitately from her seat, when she perceived that Edward was so immediately before her, almost touching her dress, that to pass him would be impossible; and he did not seem at all inclined to move. After starting forward, therefore, she sank back again in her seat—an expression of mingled chagrin, wonder and distress on her face. She was in despair, actually! What must Edward think of her? That she had abetted Kate's plan for taking his acquaintance by storm?

Edward on his part had determined that the opportunity should not be lost; he resolved to speak. But while the words he would fain have uttered, died upon his lips, a gay voice was heard without, and Frank, attempting to open the door, ceased humming his favorite opera air to wonder what was the matter with it. He twisted, he turned the bolt—all to no purpose. "Why the door is locked!" he exclaimed aloud—noticing that the key was not in it.

At this exclamation Blanche involuntary glanced up at Edward, and the look she met in return did not tend to relieve her confusion. Eyes sometimes are very eloquent—and Edward's expressed plainly what his lips refused to speak: interest—admiration—love! She turned from him; pushed the table hastily aside, and flew rather than glided across the room, to another door, which led into an ante-chamber. Great as was her haste, she opened it noiselessly, and closing it with equal caution, stood pale and trembling beside it for a moment or two, until she heard Frank, after divers exclamations of surprise, enter the room opposite the library—when she left her place of refuge,

and ran up stairs to her own room. Kate was there waiting for her.

"Well!" cried she eagerly, as Blanche rushed in and threw herself impulsively on a couch—"well! and how has my bold move prospered? Have you made friends?"

"Oh no, no, no!" answered Blanche. "A thousand times worse than before!" She covered her face with her hands, to hide the crimson of her cheeks, as she remembered Edward's look, and reflected that he could not but be aware she had seen and understood it. Kate questioned; and with some gentle reproach, Blanche told her she and Edward had remained perfectly stunned and silent until Frank came to the door; how she had then suddenly remembered that there was another mode of egress, and had availed herself of it on the instant. That was all.

"And neither of you spoke?" asked Kate, in a tone of the greatest disappointment.

"Not a syllable."

"Why did you not speak to him? just laugh it off, and so get rid of this foolish reserve?"

"I told you it was impossible; now it will be a great deal more embarrassing than ever," replied Blanche dejectedly.

Kate tapped her foot impatiently on the floor. Her philanthropic project had proved a grand failure; and, as in most cases where people meddle with affairs not concerning themselves, she had only done mischief. She begged Blanche's forgiveness, and easily obtained it—but that did not remedy the evil in the least.

CHAPTER X.

A PETTY LARGENY.

Blanche would have found it rather difficult to define her sentiments on the occasion. She thought she was now assured beyond a doubt of what she had often suspected before—that Edward's extreme shyness arose from the very opposite of aversion. Several times had she seen the same glance directed to her face; but it had always been very quickly withdrawn, as soon as Edward thought himself observed. Always until that morning—when she was conscious that it was open and unrestrained. She wondered if her own countenance had been as expressive as his. Endless, indeed, were her speculations on the subject; but she always came back to the starting point—"How dreadfully awkward it will be to meet him at dinner!"

She was spared the trial. Edward had taken the mid-day boat, and gone down to New Orleans for a few days, as he not unfrequently did. No one remarked his absence as at all unusual—and Kate and Blanche kept their own counsel as to what they suspected to be the cause of it. A school friend of Kate's came to Hollywood that afternoon with so pressing a request that they would return home with her and spend some days, that they willingly accepted the invitation; considering it a fortunate occurrence that they could leave home just then, and so avoid seeing Edward immediately.

They returned to find Edward gone—gone to Mexico. In New Orleans he had met his former tutor, who was on his way to Hollywood to try and prevail on Edward to accompany him on a geological tour through

Mexico, New Mexico, Arizona and California. It was a design which had long been entertained by Mr. Lysle, the tutor; and Edward had always promised to be his companion on the journey. He esteemed it a peculiar chance, which thus offered itself, of escaping from a life that was becoming literally unbearable to him; and greatly as he disliked to pain his father by leaving him, he did not hesitate a moment in resolving to go.* So earnest were his entreaties for Mr. Clerville's consent to the plan, that the latter could not withhold it—more particularly as this had been, for years, almost as favorite a scheme with Edward as with Mr. Lysle.

“And when do you purpose leaving?” he inquired.

He was a little startled, and Mrs. Clerville not a little shocked, to hear that they must leave Hollywood that very night—in order to make a few necessary arrangements in New Orleans, and be in time for the boat which they wished to take from that port.

“Leave to-night!” Mrs. Clerville repeated, in consternation. “Why, my dear sir, that is absolutely impossible. For such a journey as this, considerable preparation will be required—to say nothing of Edward's leaving us so suddenly. A fortnight, surely, will make little difference in your arrangements. Do grant us this time in which to reconcile ourselves to the thought of parting with my son. My dear Edward, you cannot think of going so soon?”

Edward's resolution wavered one instant, as he glanced from Mrs. Clerville's face to the anxious one of his father; but only for an instant. He shook his head with an attempt at a smile—saying that he could not think of detaining Mr. Lysle, when, in truth, there was no occasion for doing so.

“I really think, my dear mother,” he continued, “that so abrupt a departure will be less painful than

if I deferred it for weeks. I wish very much to go, and my father always desired that I should—but I am afraid that were I to go through the usual process of preparation, and think of parting from you all, my resolution might fail me.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said Mr. Clerville with forced cheerfulness : and he began to discuss their arrangements—while his wife went to superintend the packing of Edward’s trunks, and agreeing with Lucy in wishing that the tutor had sought a companion elsewhere.

As the hour of parting approached, Edward felt nervous and sick. His father and brother were to accompany them to New Orleans—so that he had now but to take leave of Mrs. Clerville and Lucy. He was spared the difficulty of saying good-bye to Blanche; to avoid which, was his principal reason for departing so suddenly. For although he had told the truth in representing Mr. Lysle as exceedingly anxious to start without delay, he had forgotten to mention that he had nevertheless offered to wait a fortnight, or even a month, for Edward—that the latter might make any preparations he desired.

The carriage was at the door to convey them to the landing; Frank and Mr. Lysle standing beside it waiting; Mr. Clerville was speaking to his wife and Lucy; and Edward went to the back hall to see the servants of the household, who had assembled there “to tell Mass Edward good-bye.” His self-control almost upset by the sobs of Mom Letty and his old nurse, he hurried up stairs for a moment, to regain, if possible, some degree of composure, before attempting the final scene with his mother and sister. He stood within his own chamber, and tried hard to swallow the choking sensations in his throat. “It is useless to defer it longer,” he murmured to himself.

"The sooner it is over—" he ran down stairs. Passing the open door of the library, he yielded, almost against his will, to a temptation that had been tormenting him ever since he had decided, the day before, to go. He walked quickly into the room—to a table on which lay a number of daguerreotypes—seized and concealed in his bosom one with which he was, secretly, very familiar, and joining Mrs. Clerville and Lucy a moment afterwards, made his adieux to them with more composure than he could, a moment before, have hoped to command. The little act of theft in which he had just indulged, had created a diversion of thought. Partly the excitement of the mere act, and partly the self-congratulation at having obtained the treasure he had long coveted, abstracted his thoughts from the pain of leave-taking.

"Do not forget to tell Kate and—and Blanche goodbye for me," he said. "I am very sorry I missed seeing them."

What effort it cost him to utter that little sentence, no one conceived.

CHAPTER XI.

COMFORTABLE REFLECTIONS.

And so Kate and Blanche returned to find Edward and Frank both gone. The vessel in which they had taken passage to Vera Cruz did not sail at the time they expected, and Mr. Clerville returned home, Frank remaining to see his brother off. Instead of blushing as she generally did, Blanche turned pale when she heard of Edward's departure; but as her face was concealed by her veil at the time, no one noticed it.

"How lonely it seems!" said Kate that evening.

"When will Frank be back?—and how long is Edward going to stay in Mexico, papa?"

"Frank will be back next week, I suppose. If Edward's health continues good, he will be gone a year or two, I think."

Kate sighed, and looked towards Blanche, who was bending over a book so that her face was completely shaded by her long curls. Dull and depressed, the family party separated much earlier than usual that night.

"I do wish Edward had not gone on this geological tour that he has been talking about so long," said Kate, as she stood before the toilette-table combing out her hair. "It is a perfect wild goose chase, it seems to me, to be ranging about in Mexico, and those territories, after 'scientific information,' forsooth! Edward is not a very social person, certainly—and we never had much of his company when he was at home—but still I feel uncomfortable at his being away; and I know Papa hates it terribly."

Blanche did not answer, and turning, Kate saw that she had leaned her face down on the table, and was sobbing almost convulsively.

"What is the matter? Do tell me what ails you, darling?" cried Kate, springing to her side, and trying to raise her head.

"I know, Kate, that your brother just left home to avoid me. How unfortunate I am to be the unintentional cause of banishing him?"

"Left home to avoid you! What an idea? Why, he and Mr. Lysle have been speaking of this for years. I do assure you that Edward has been wild to go ever since the scheme was first started—and never rested till Papa consented for him to accompany his tutor. Now do let me see you smile again!"

Blanche's bright red lips parted in a faint smile, and

Kate went to bed satisfied; nor did she long stay awake to lament her brother's absence. Her soft, regular breathing soon told Blanche that she slept; but it was in vain Blanche shut her eyes and tried to emulate so good an example. Despite every effort of resistance, she could not but dwell on the thought of Edward's departure. She was not in love with him, assuredly; she did not even like him, she believed; but she was very conscious of an interest regarding him that might easily have glided into liking—perhaps love. His face haunted her as no other face had; and that the tones of his voice were pleasant to her ear, she needed no better evidence than that of the quickened pulsation they had latterly failed not to produce. And then only two days before, she believed it certain that he loved her! Before that she had struggled against indulging a single thought of him; but there was something very captivating in the idea of his silent devotion. She had been mistaken, of course—and she upbraided herself bitterly for the vanity by which she had been misled. She must banish all recollection of him from her mind; fortunately, his image had not yet taken possession of her heart, she thought. He was gone—and there was an end of the little romance she had half unconsciously cherished. She congratulated herself that she would have no embarrassing meeting to dread on to-morrow, or to-morrow, or to-morrow; at which comfortable reflection she wept heartily; and finally went to sleep, after wishing for the first time that her mother had not married—and that she had never seen Edward Clerville.

The next morning, she awoke with a severe headache and sore-throat—the consequences of a cold she had taken the day before. She was not sorry to have so good an excuse as these bodily ailments afforded,

for the pale cheeks and languid eyes that excited so much comment at the breakfast-table. Mrs. Clerville—who had a great horror of a sore-throat—prescribed codling and quiet; and insisted on her returning there for the day.

The next morning, at the breakfast table, her pale cheeks and languid eyes excited so much comment that she owned she had taken a slight cold, and was not very well. Codling and quiet were prescribed by Mrs. Clerville, who insisted on her returning to her room, and remaining there for the day.

“Yes, Mamma, I’ll go directly,” said she. “But I want to get a book out of the library first, so that Kate can read to me.”

“Let me go for it,” said Lucy. “What shall I get? What do you want to hear?”

“Anything amusing. Let me see”—and she followed Lucy into the library—“I think I would like one of Shakspeare’s plays. But not a tragedy. Let me see!” she repeated. “*Taming the Shrew*?—no; that is so coarse! *Comedy of Errors*?—that is so ridiculous, I should laugh so much, and make my head ache more than it does now. I always liked *Much Ado About Nothing*. Get that, dear Lucy.”

“Here it is,” said Kate, while Lucy was looking on another shelf, and Blanche had been leaning carelessly against a table. “Come on, now;” and they all three went—Blanche having ascertained what she wanted to know—i. e., whether Edward had taken off here likeness. It was not on the table with the others, and she had little doubt but that it *was* in Edward’s possession. Her curiosity satisfied in this matter, she swallowed with very dutiful submission the potion with which her mother was awaiting her in her own room—(the identical preparation, by the way, which Edward had taken so reluctantly a few days before :

it was Mrs. Clerville's specific for a cold!) put her feet into hot water, and went to bed afterwards, as directed. Her mother having superintended the affair to that point, kissed her and Lucy and Kate, and left the room. Kate reclined on the bed by her, and Lucy, seating herself on the other side, read, in her soft and peculiarly pleasant voice, the quarrels and quips of Benedick and Beatrice, totally unconscious how Blanche was applying the story, the while. And yet, as Blanche said to herself, no two people could be more utterly unlike than Benedick and Edward, or Beatrice and herself. Still, there was something about the story that made her apply it to her own case—and it pleased her for the time.

She awoke the next morning amazed at herself for indulging, what seemed to her now, so indelicate an interest about Edward. She was glad he was gone—she really was. So she said to herself. And perhaps she was *not* sorry—now that the first shock of the idea was over. The test of love is absence, it has been said, which cures a false, but confirms a real passion. Blanche's—judged by this test—was not real. Edward would not have been flattered, though neither would he have been disappointed, could he have seen her sunny face, unclouded by a single thought of him.

Some days afterwards Lucy made the discovery that the likeness was missing. What could have become of it, she asked: Blanche was, of course, unable to form a conjecture; while Kate instantly accused a certain Mr. Noble—a professed admirer of Blanche's—of the petty larceny.

"Abominable that he should venture to do such a thing!" she cried indignantly, the likeness having been her property. "I believe I will ask him for it. Now I know, Blanche, by your blushing so, that you are as sure as I am that he took it."

Blanche protested her belief in his innocence, and her wonder as to who could have taken so worthless a thing. But the odium of the theft certainly rested on the head of the innocent Mr. Noble.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EXPLANATION

There is nothing more effectual in taking an unpleasant idea out of the mind, than the hurry and bustle of travelling, and of pressing engagements. During their run down the river, and for several days after reaching New Orleans, Edward was so busily occupied in attending to various indispensable arrangements, that he had little time for solitary thought. Blanche's image was not dislodged from his heart, but he was prevented by these outside influences from paying his usual devotions to it. But his arrangements completed—his attention no longer absorbed by them—his spirit sank at the remembrance of her bright face, and the thought of the length of time which must elapse ere he should see it again. And would it be the same to him that it was even now? or—he looked up at Frank, who was writing a letter. Edward himself had been arranging some trinkets which he intended as parting gifts to his mother and sisters.

"I dare say, Frank," he suddenly remarked, "that you will be married before I return."

"It is not impossible," answered his brother, puffing away at his cigar, and writing on.

"Do you think then," pursued Edward with some hesitation, "that I should be taking too great a liberty in sending this?"

He put into his brother's hand a package which was addressed—"For my sisters Lucy, Blanche and Kate."

"Taking too great a liberty!" repeated Frank; and he looked up in surprise.

"You know I never exchanged half a dozen words with—Miss Ormond, and she might think it an impertinence in me to offer her a present. But I did not like to omit her in sending to my sisters."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Frank, impatiently. "An impertinence, indeed! Why you forget the connection between us. She never hesitates more than Lucy or Kate does, in taking anything I offer her."

"You! oh, that is different."

"Only different because you have chosen to make it so by your manner to her." He opened the package and began to examine the contents. Edward stood behind him, looking over his shoulder.

"These pearls," Edward observed, "are for Lucy—and this bracelet and arrow for Kate. These"—he took up a bracelet of ruby and emerald, and a diamond cross—"perhaps *you* had better give them to her."

"To *her*," said Frank, laughing; "and who is that? your phraseology is quite lover-like, I protest. Good Heavens, my dear fellow," he added seriously, "give over this nonsense about Blanche! It is too ridiculous for a sensible man to indulge in."

"What do you mean?" asked Edward, falteringly—turning first red and then pale—for he thought that Frank had penetrated his secret and was laughing at it."

"Why I mean that your reserve and coldness to our mother's daughter is not only absurd, but discourteous and ungenerous. Forgive such plain words; but it is true."

"True! perhaps it is," said Edward, ruefully; "yet

those are harsh words, too ! But if it is true, how am I to help it ? I assure you I have tried ; but I never could speak to her, and she never would speak to me."

" You certainly did not expect her to make the advances that should have come from you ?"

" N—o. That is, a woman can always find a way to do a thing if she wishes to do it. And I—she might have seen and known that my reserve arose from the confounded *mauvais honte* with which I am cursed."

Frank turned around on his chair and looked at his brother. " Was this really the cause of it, Edward ? and this alone ?" he asked.

" Why what else could it be ? What did you think it was ?"

" I never could understand the reason of it. But I am very sorry I did not know sooner that it was only diffidence. I am sure I could have persuaded Blanche to hold out the golden sceptre of ease to you. Why did you not tell me ?"

" I thought the fact was sufficiently obvious for you or any one else to see," answered Edward ; " and besides——" he was on the point of telling his brother all—his love—infatuation, as he honestly considered it ; but the sudden recollection that it was his rival as well as brother to whom he spoke, and the reflection of the pain it would be to Frank to hear it, sealed his lips. He concluded the sentence in another way. " Besides, I doubt if you would have been more successful than Kate was, who attempted the same thing."

Frank again glanced up with surprise and curiosity—and Edward, who found a singular pleasure in, for the first time, talking of Blanche, described the scene in the library with considerable comic humor. It is true that in his recital he translated the abashed timidity of Blanche into haughtiness, and his own rather bold resolution, to craven fear. Frank laughed

heartily, and declared he would have given his favorite horse, Tipton, to have witnessed the scene.

"So you see," observed Edward, in conclusion, "that it is quite impossible to establish anything like ease or unreserve between Miss Or——"

"Why don't you call her Blanche?" interrupted Frank, impatiently.

"Well—between—Blanche and myself. Now do you think I ought to offer her these?"—he pointed to the jewels—"or will you just take the whole of them, and present them yourself, saying that I commissioned you to get some *souvenirs* for my sisters?"

"No," answered Frank; "that would do so far as Lucy and Kate are concerned, but would be scarcely respectful to Blanche, considering how formally you have treated her. You must write a note."

"I write to *her*!" said Edward, aghast. "Why she would think I had lost my senses! Impossible! Preposterous!" He turned, from the table, saying— "You will have to manage the matter in the best way you can, Frank. Make what message or excuses for me you think fit. I must go out now and have some likenesses taken for my mother and Lucy. What sort was it they wanted? Let me see"—he took out his note book—"Oh, ivorytypes. Are you coming with me?"

"If you will wait until I finish this letter."

CHAPTER XIII.

A NICE RUMMAGE.

Frank's reception, when he made his appearance at home again, was warm enough to satisfy the most ex-

acting of men. He was kissed and petted to his heart's content.

"And Edward? how did you leave Edward? Was he in good health and spirits?—and did he sail at the time expected?" they all asked—all but Blanche.

"Yes, he sailed the day before I left the city. He must be about the middle of the Gulf by this time. I had almost determined once to go with him—I disliked so to say good-bye. But I thought it would be too heart-breaking to you all to lose both of us at once—and so gave up the idea."

"Oh, we could not live without you," said Kate. "Could we, Blanche?"

"No indeed," was the reply. "We should pine away and die of grief in less than a month if you ran off and left us."

"I have some *souvenirs* which Edward sent to you, ladies," said Frank, as they rose from the tea-table; for he had arrived just in time to join them as they sat down. "Have my trunks been taken to my room yet, John?"

"Yes sir; they were carried up immediately," answered the servant to whom he spoke.

"Blanche! Kate! don't you want a rummage? I do not presume to ask my mother, or even Lucy, to engage in so undignified an amusement. You shall bring them the spoils."

Mrs. Clerville and Lucy smiled, as the two girls went dancing out of the room—followed by Frank. He unlocked one of the trunks, and Kate lifting the lid of the tray, she and Blanche sat down on the floor beside it and commenced the process of sacking; chattering fast and gayly all the time to Frank, who drew up a chair, seated himself thereon, and held the light for them. Kate, with feminine instinct, took up the package containing the casket of jewels, and be-

gan untying it—while Blanche, equally attracted by some large daguerreotype cases, opened the first one she picked up. She started back—blushing deeply.

“Well,” said Frank, who was looking at her, “what is the matter? why do you blush so?” He laughed.

‘I was disappointed,’ answered she, smiling. ‘I expected to see the likeness of yourself which you promised me.’ She shut the one she held so quickly, that it might have seemed she apprehended its hurting her in some way.

‘What is it?’ inquired Kate, who had been busy with an obstinate knot. ‘Lend me your knife, Frank to cut this! Oh, Blanche, do see!’ she exclaimed the next moment, as she at last opened one casket after the other, and displayed the jewels. ‘Are they not beautiful?’

She pushed up the open lace sleeve which Blanche wore, and clasped all three bracelets on the fair rounded arm. ‘Did you say Edward sent them, Frank?’

‘Yes—he selected them himself; to suit your different styles of beauty, I suppose. The set of pearls is for Lucy—this compound of emeralds and rubies for Bianca la belle, and the ruby bracelet for you, Petling. This is yours, too’—he took up a diamond arrow. ‘I think Edward said it would look well in your dark hair; and—’ he clasped around the throat of Blanche a Venitian chain, to which was appended an elegant diamond cross—‘I presume he was thinking of Belinda’s cross when selecting this. Here is something for my mother. There is a note with it.’ Books for Mr. Clerville—trinkets and etceteras that Frank himself had chosen—and some keep-sakes sent by Edward to the servants, filled up the trunk. Kate rummaged over everything with the delight of a child. But Blanche did not enjoy it so much. She had taken

off the bracelet and chain, and held them hesitatingly in her hand.

'You must take these, Kate,' she said at last, laughingly. 'You know I cannot keep them, though I am extremely obliged to——'

'You don't surely mean that you are going to refuse to keep them?' said Kate with a blank look. .

'Now, Katinka, darling, you know I must? You know very well that I could not think of accepting them! I am sure you do not think I ought, Frank?'

'But I do, though!' replied he, laughing. 'Come Blanche, because Edward was too diffident to speak to you ever, why were you so cruel as never to give him one word or smile of encouragement? It was not like yourself to act so haughtily as he says you did that morning in the library'—

'The library! how did you know about that?' exclaimed both the girls in one breath.

'Edward gave me a most amusing description of it—though he said it was far from being amusing to him at the time; and that you, Kate, deserve to be condemned to a month's silence for perpetrating so alarming a jest, on such a diffident man as himself.'

'I act haughtily!' cried Blanche, in a tone of laughing vexation. 'Now that is too bad, I declare! How could he have thought so? But you don't really think I was to blame, do you?—I mean that my manner was the cause of Mr. Clerville's ——'

'Mr. Clerville,s!' repeated Frank. 'It is "Miss Ormond," and "Mr. Clerville," always, with this ceremonious young lady and gentleman. Well, you are both incorrigible! I give you up.'

'But I should be so sorry,' said Blanche, almost crying with vexation, 'if I thought it was my fault. I never liked to make any advances to him, because I supposed he disliked me—but if he only avoided me

from diffidence! 'You see,' she added, turning to Frank, 'his manner was so different to yours, that I was sure he did not like me,—and you know I could not force myself on his attention.'

'Oh pshaw!' cried Kate—'do forget all about it now. We have been worried enough already on the subject; and you were no more to blame, Blanché, than Glencé was. I wonder at your saying so, even in jest, Frank! Edward is certainly the strangest person I ever saw in my life. And so he told you about my locking Blanche and himself into the library? What did he say about Blanche? Somehow I never should have thought he would tell any one of it.'

'He said he was so frightened at first, when he found himself alone and face to face with "Miss Ormond," that his first impulse was to vanish out of the window, which was fortunately open; but the next instant he concluded that now was the time to break through the restraint that had tormented him so long, and he resolved to speak. But he could not think of the right thing to say, in the first place; and, secondly, he felt a decided sensation of choking at every attempt to articulate. His situation, he said, reminded him exactly of a story he had read once of a country magistrate who was suddenly called upon to marry a couple, having to trust to his memory for the formula which he usually read out of a book. The puzzled Squire coughed and cleared his throat, and cleared his throat and coughed again—while the company, and the party themselves, stood expectant—and finally began, first the burial of the dead, then the preamble of a will, and so on through a whole paragraph of blunders, until he finally stumbled by accident upon the marriage ceremony, when his bewilderment vanished, and he went through the remainder of the service without difficulty.'—*Par. Ed.*

ward said, he was not himself so fortunate, for, just as he had opened his lips to make a pretty and appropriate speech, after having mentally rejected half a dozen "first intentions" that had preceded it in his mind, "Miss Ormond" gave the table, and himself with it an unequivocal *shove*, and made a haughty but expeditious exit, leaving him standing in the middle of the floor anathematizing Kate's propensity for jesting and his own confounded *mauvais honte*. 'I give you his own words.'

The girls laughed until their bright eyes were brimming with pearly mirth-drops.

'Does Edward really talk in that way,' asked Kate, at last.

'In what way?'

'As you were just repeating. I can't imagine him talking and laughing like other people.'

'Why you must have a singular idea of him.'

'No—~~an~~ idea that he is singular.'

'But now,' said Frank, 'I think we have been gossiping in secret council long enough. Had we not better go down stairs?'

'I think so, indeed!' said Blanche.

She held out her hand for Frank to assist her to rise from the floor, saying to Kate, as they prepared to leave the room, 'You must take these, Katydid.'

'But I will not! Frank, did not Edward send some special message to Blanche?'

'He told me to conduct the delicate affair with the best skill I could command, as he was very much

'He might consider his offering her a present
'absence?'

'Oh, dear!—you hear? I am sure

'Edward' feeling, by a much

him guilty of an im-

‘But why need he know anything about it? Frank can tell him, when he writes next, that I think the bracelet and cross beautiful, and that I thank him for his courteous attention; and he need not know but that I kept them.’

‘But, whether he knows it or not, ask Mamma, and see if she don’t say you ought to keep them.’

‘Do don’t say anything about it! Pray do not, Katydid!’

‘You are a willful witch!’ said Kate.

So Edward’s offerings reposed untouched in their caskets, in a drawer of Blanche’s toilette table, Kate absolutely refusing to take them.

CHAPTER XIV

A FALSE ALARM.

And Edward? How did he succeed in the laudable resolution made when he decided to accompany Mr. Lysle, that he would leave his love for Blanche behind him?

His consistency was as remarkable in this as it was in his having fallen in love with her at first sight, after being so apprehensive of the discord which her presence was to introduce into his family circle. Oh yes, he would certainly cast off the foolish sentiment by which he had been so sorely worried. At home, where he saw her every day, and was, besides, without any regular occupation of mind, it was rather a difficult matter to control his thoughts. But with all the diversity which his present life would afford, what could be more easy?

He wisely, therefore, in view of his stoical resolution, appropriated her likeness; and prudently gazed

upon it for hours every day. But that was only during his voyage, he said to his conscience when a smart twinge remonstrated with him on the subject. A sea voyage is always dull to one, whose habits are as unsocial as Edward's were. Books inevitably lose their charm if they are taken per force, and merely to pass away time. While he was a prisoner on the deep, he would grant himself the only amusement that pleased him. Shut up in his state room, or alone upon the deck, he was very constant in his devotions to the bit of polished metal on which the sun had painted the face of Bianca la belle.

Habit is a wonderful thing. Edward having the habit of looking at the "counterfeit presentment" of Blanche, and thinking continually of her, during his voyage, was rather surprised that he could not immediately drop the habit, when, on landing, he no longer needed occupation and amusement. He "pished" and "pshawed" at his "confounded folly"—but finding the effort to overcome this folly vain, quietly resigned himself to its indulgence—contenting himself with thinking that when he heard of her marriage, he would rub out the daguerreotype, and strangle his love for her.

Some months afterwards he thought the time had come to him to fulfil that magnanimous determination, when, on opening the package of letters and papers brought to him by his servant one morning, he was startled by the sight of a silver-edged envelope, with the customary seal of clasped hands. The address was Frank's writing. At first he could not open either it or the letters that would give the particulars of the affair. He sat looking at them, dumb and hopeless, for some minutes. When he did take up one at last, it was the bridal missive. He might as well know the worst at once. With a sort of indig-

nant spite, he tore the clasped hands apart in opening the envelope, and took out the enclosure. There were three cards, the largest of which, deeply bordered with silver, he raised with trembling fingers.

“Mr. and Mrs. Clerville at home,” etc.,—when? the fifth of next month. Slowly he picked up the other cards, which were held together by a dainty silver cord. His eye fell reluctantly on the lady’s name—“Miss Clerville.” Good Heavens! it was not Blanche, after all. How could he have forgotten Lucy’s marriage? He hrew himself back in his chair with the air of a man who had been on the eve of drowning, and who had grasped a rope just in time to save himself.

CHAPTER XV

THE PRINCIPLE OF COUNTER IRRITATION.

Everything went on at Hollywood just as usual for several months, until Lucy’s wedding day approached. A family council was held to decide the question of what sort of a wedding it should be. Kate opened the business of the meeting. She was of opinion, that as the first break-up in a family is a very sad affair to all except the party principally concerned, the best that can be done is to make at least a pretence of considering it a pleasant and mirthful occasion. She declared, besides, that she knew if it was a solemn private marriage, she would indubitably take hysterics and have a regular scene; consequently, she moved that it be as gay a wedding as possible. Blanche seconded Kate’s motion, and Frank was entirely of their minds on the subject. Mrs. Clerville suggested that Lucy and Dare-devil were the proper

persons to pronounce in the matter, and she appealed to them to speak. It was a matter of perfect indifference to Mr. Deville whether he was married before five, or five hundred people. He referred the decision entirely to Lucy. Lucy rather preferred a quiet—here she was interrupted by Kate, who suddenly burst into tears, and threw her arms around her sister, exclaiming, “Lucy, dear, *I can't give you up quietly*—and so I want a gay wedding for the same reason that the Hindoos raise a loud noise at a suttee—to drown the cries of the victim; I, be it understood, being the victim in the present case, not you. But, after all,” she cried, the next moment, before any one else could speak, “after all, it is dreadfully selfish in me to think only of my wishes, when you are the one to be consulted! It must be private and quiet, then; and I really will *try* to behave properly, and not cry. Blanche, you will have to pinch me all the time. I heard Dr. Eldridge explaining the use of counter-irritants to mamma yesterday, and I will take a hint from it. When you see me in danger of bursting into tears, you must administer an excruciating pinch, and it will relieve the pain in my heart by attracting my attention to the pain in my arm.”

“But I can not,” said Blanche, “because I shall need pinching, too, Katinka.”

“Just delegate the duty to me,” said Frank; “I will stand between you, and I promise, if there be any virtue in the counter-irritant principle, so applied, Lucy shall not be drowned in your floods of tears.”

But here Lucy herself interfered, remarking that on consideration she believed large weddings were the best; a marriage being an affair that ought to be solemnized with some pomp and circumstance.

So a brilliant wedding it was; with the usual concomitants of bridal white silks and satins obscured

in clouds of illusion, orange blossoms, brides-maids and breakfast. Kate dreaded it extremely; fearing in earnest, that she might take a fit of hysterical weeping; and she privately engaged Frank to employ the pinching remedy if he saw it needed. But, by the kindness of fate, and the assiduities of the handsome groomsman, who was her joint attendant, the occasion passed without the discord of tears. She even managed to take leave of her sister afterwards without any overpowering demonstrations. But when Lucy was really gone, Kate's spirits quite gave way. She ran up to her own room followed by Blanche; and when Frank returned from the landing to which he had accompanied the newly married pair, he found them both fairly sobbing.

'Monstrous!' he cried, pausing on the threshold, and lifting both hands. 'Now for the pinching!' he continued, advancing towards them; 'or shall I join your dolorous mood?'

He flourished his pocket-handkerchief so effectively that Kate and Blanche were soon laughing merrily, and he took care to prevent their relapsing back into the vapors. He rehearsed to them the speech which he ought to have made at the breakfast that morning; related various amusing incidents which had escaped their notice, but not his; and finally, having restored their usual cheerfulness started up and said:

'Now, Petites, you are good children, and deserve to be remembered for it. Get rid of this wedding toggery, wash your faces, which are still a little swollen, put on your hats, and come with me, I have something to show you.'

Having followed his advice, they joined him in the hall below, and he led the way to the river. The little island to which they had made so venturesome a

voyage in the fall was now in its spring dress, and one bower of loveliest verdure.

'Where are you going?' asked Blanche, as Frank took the path leading directly to the place from which they had launched their boat.

'You will see in a moment,' he answered, walking quickly on. 'Here,' he said, as they reached the river side, and he pointed to a beautiful little sail boat that was fastened to the stake, 'here is a present for you. I had this little craft built for you, on condition that you never venture into it alone.'

'How pretty! how beautiful!' they exclaimed. 'Really you are a dear creature!' said Blanche.

'That you are!' added Kate.

'Much obliged for your good opinions,' he said, laughing. 'You have not asked what the name of the boat is. Don't you think it deserves a name?'

'Certainly it does. It is a perfect beauty. What is the name?'

Frank pointed to the white pennon on the slender mast, which floated out at the moment as if to give them an opportunity of reading it.

'THE EDWARD,' said Kate, laughing as she read it. Blanche blushed, of course, and said nothing.

'It is a *souvenir* of your wild adventure. But enter! I have improvised a picnic just for ourselves.'

They gained the shore of the island this time without such tiring toil as before, and found the place in fete dress for their reception; the vines and shrubs trimmed into tasteful and convenient form—cushioned seats—and an elegant collation, as the newspapers call such things, spread temptingly on a table under a tree.

'Surely the fairies have been here providing for our comfort,' said Blanche.

'No, it was the brownies,' answered Frank. 'I

know you must be hungry, for I can certify that neither of you have eaten to-day, and I do not believe you ate anything yesterday. I told Mom Letty to send us over a luncheon, and it almost consoled her, at the moment, for Lucy's going away. You must do justice to her guage of our appetites. She will be sorely distressed otherwise.'

Kate and Blanche acknowledged that they were hungry since their walk, but protested against being condemned to fulfil Mom Letty's expectations in the way of appetite.

'I wonder she did not kill us, trying to make us eat so much, when we were children,' said Kate. 'Only see, now, here is enough for a dozen or two people.'

'And what a heterogeneous collection of edibles,' said Blanche. 'But how thoughtful she was! Everything that she knows either of us like; and yonder comes one of your brownies, Frank, with something else.'

They looked around, and saw Frank's servant crossing to the island in a canoe that looked very like their old acquaintance. He brought a further addition to the repast.

Now, Robert,' said Kate, 'mind you don't take a single one of these things back. And be sure and tell Mom Letty that they were eaten up, every bit. If you can't manage it yourself, get some of the other servants to help you.'

'Yes 'm,' replied Robert, smiling, 'and Mom Letty say you and Miss Blanche must be sure and make a good dinner; how she's afraid you'll starve yourselves.' said.

'No we won't,' said Blanche. 'Tell her we are very hungry, and are going to eat all the nice things she sent.'

Robert having been dispatched with this comforting message to the cook, they proceeded to do justice to her good cheer, with many a laugh at her ruling passion for making her children, as she called them, eat.

‘Edward was always her despair,’ said Frank. ‘She never could get him to eat enough to keep a bird alive, as she expresses it, and she firmly believes this is the reason his health used to be so delicate.’

‘I wish he was here to-day,’ said Kate, with a sigh. ‘And poor mamma and papa! we have left them all alone in the deserted house.’ Her eyes filled with tears. ‘They must be very lonely. Ought we not to go back to dinner?’

‘There is no need of it,’ answered Frank. ‘I begged Colonel and Mrs. Ashton to stay and dine with them; and Mr. Burnley and Dr. Eldridge are there too.’

‘They will do very well then,’ said Kate, cheerfully. ‘Oh Frank,’ she added suddenly, ‘do tell me why you laughed so yesterday morning as you were reading the letter you received at breakfast?’

‘Did I laugh?’

‘Yes, you did; and in such a peculiar way, that I was dying of curiosity to know about it—but in the hurry and confusion since I have not remembered to ask.’

He laughed again—but said the letter was only from a college friend of his, whom he hoped to have the pleasure of presenting to them soon. ‘He is coming next week to pay me a visit.’

‘But what is there unusual in that? What is there about the man or his letter to make you laugh so?’ inquired Kate suspiciously.

‘Nothing in the world about either to be laughed at. There is nothing ludicrous in the man, himself, I assure you; and as to the letter’—he took it out of his

pocket—‘here it is! Read it yourself, and see if there be anything ridiculous about it.’

Blanche leaned over Kate’s shoulder to read it. It was a commonplace letter enough—just such as any young man might write to his friend—informing Frank that, as he was passing down the river, the writer proposed, if Frank was at home, to stop on his way and spend some days with him. That was all. It was signed *Henry Lorimer*.

‘Henry Lorimer,’ repeated Kate. ‘Rather a pretty name, I think. What sort of person is he?’

‘Very much such a person as I am myself,’ answered her brother, with an air of amused enjoyment that puzzled the girls and excited their curiosity: ‘Eyes, nose, mouth and chin—digital and pedal extrenities—and as proud as the devil!’

‘Why, Frank!’

‘Well, I beg your pardon for the word. It slipped from my lips unawares.’

‘Blanche,’ commenced Frank, the day on which he expected his friend—‘Blanche!—but no; I believe it will be safest not to tell you; for if you had the extraordinary self-control not to tell Kate with your tongue, there would be no preventing your face from informing her.’

‘You are very flattering,’ said Blanche. ‘What were you going to say?’

‘That I have found a mode of reprisal for that library affair that you were so anxious to requite. But I have concluded to leave it for a surprise to you as well as Kate.’

‘Really!’ exclaimed Blanche—‘but why did you tell me anything about it then? You have just excited my curiosity, and now will not gratify it.’

‘I thought you always boasted that you are not troubled with the feminine failing of curiosity.’

'Well, I have not a great deal. But still that is no reason you should trifle with it,' she added, smiling. 'When is Dr. Lorimer coming? In the early or the night boat?'

'I do not know. I am going down to the landing now, to wait for him—and if he does not come I shall have to go back again to-night.'

He went—and in due time the servant who accompanied him returned alone with the horses.

The gentleman Mass Frank had gone to meet was on the boat, he said—but was in such a hurry to go on that he could not stop, then—so Mass Frank went with him, and did not know when he would be back. A most unsatisfactory message this, to Kate and Blanche. Lucy married and gone—Edward away—(but that was a mere nominal loss!) and Frank running off and leaving them so! It was dismal.

'I tell you what Blanche,' said Kate, 'we shall have to fall in love with somebody, just for amusement! By the way,' she continued, laughing, 'do you know that every one considers it a settled affair that Frank and yourself will make a match?'

'Mercy on me!' cried Blanche, laughing—'What an absurd idea!'

'I thought so when it was first suggested to me—but the more I think of it, the more natural it seems. Why should you not fall in love with each other?'

'I do not know, I am surè,' laughed Blanche—'but you see we have not done so.'

'Then I wish you would set about it immediately,' said Kate; 'for I have no idea of giving up Frank to anybody in the wide world but yourself. I used to be horribly jealous at the bare thought of his marrying; and really believed it would break my heart to see him love anybody else better than he loved me. But I will give him to you, Blanchette.'

‘It is very generous of you, Katydid,’ cried Blanche, gaily—‘but I expect it is because you know your generosity will not be put to the test.’

CHAPTER XVI.

A MISTAKE.

Frank staid away a week, and then wrote that he would be at home on the day after his letter reached Hollywood.

‘He does not say whether Dr. Lorimer is coming with him or not,’ said Blanche.

‘Not a word! Just like him, to forget it,’ answered Kate.

They went that afternoon late to take their usual walk, and, the weather being beautiful, extended it to a considerable distance in the direction of the landing.

‘Yonder is Frank now, I declare!’ exclaimed Kate, stopping a moment to look. ‘And walking, too! I wonder how that happens?’ Starting off, she sped with flying steps to meet him.

Blanche was about to follow, when she was arrested by hearing her name called in Frank’s voice. She turned, and he was standing beside her. Amazed—half bewildered—she glanced around instinctively to see what had become of Kate, and how Frank had so instantaneously transferred himself from the spot, some distance off, at which she saw him but the instant before, to where he now was. Marvellous! There he still was, some hundred yards in advance of her on the path, and Kate was still bounding towards him. She looked so perfectly astounded as

she turned once more to the Frank beside her, that he burst into a fit of laughter as he said, pointing to the other :

‘It is Lorimer ! Look !’

Blanche did look, just in time to see Kate reach the advancing gentleman and throw herself into his arms, or rather throw her arms around him, with the most affectionate *empressment*, kissing him repeatedly, at the same time.

‘What did you stay away so long for, Frank, darling ?’ she exclaimed with caressing reproach, ‘and—’

She stopped suddenly, struck with some strangeness in Frank’s manner, and, drawing back a little, looked in his face. More bewildered than Blanche had been a moment before, she stood transfixed, until roused by the voice of the real Frank behind her, saying :

‘Lorimer, allow me to present you to my sister, Miss Ormond.’ Dr. Lorimer bowed to Blanche. ‘My sister, Miss Clerville, has already presented herself to you in the most affectionate manner,’ he could not forbear adding.

Poor Kate, comprehending now instantly her mistake, turned all sorts of colors, and seemed on the point of bursting into tears. She hid her face on Blanche’s shoulder.

‘Why, Katinka, darling, why should you mind it so ?’ whispered Blanche, who, if it had been herself, would have been equally distressed. ‘It was the most natural mistake in the world. I am sure I should have shared it, had not Frank stopped me in time. I never saw such a striking resemblance,’ she said aloud to the gentlemen. ‘The only difference is that your hair and eyes are a little the darkest, Dr. Lorimer.’

‘We are continually taken for each other,’ Dr. Lorimer replied; then glancing with interest towards Kate, he added, with a little hesitation, ‘I am sorry that Miss Clerville should so much dislike her very natural mistake. I will try to forget it, if she insists upon my doing so.’

Why, Petting,’ said Frank, trying to raise her head, ‘you have not spoken to me yet. Do not think the mystification was intentional on my part. I assure you it was not. I intended to surprise you and Blanche, but—’ he saw that Kate was not likely to recover from her distress just then, and, turning to his friend, proposed walking on.

‘They are gone,’ said Blanche, softly. ‘Now, pray do not care so much! What was it, after all?’

Kate raised her face, all mottled with crimson and paleness, and wet with tears. ‘Oh, Blanche, is it not too dreadful?’

‘Dreadful!—why no! If it was any one else, you would think it the funniest thing imaginable. Just laugh it off, as you used to tell me about Edward. Come, Katinka ma belle, let me see you practice your own precepts.’

‘But you never threw yourself into Edward’s arms and—kissed him!’ cried Kate, with mingled chagrin and despair.

‘No, indeed!’ answered Blanche hastily, in a tone which evidently expressed her thanksgiving therefor.

‘There,’ said Kate, ‘you see how you would have hated it, as much as I do!’

‘But you know it would have been very different,’ said Blanche. ‘Dr. Lorimer does not dislike you, as Edward does me.’

‘What did Frank let it happen so for?’ cried Kate, with wrathful impatience. ‘What was he doing away

from the man, when he might have anticipated—it is *too* bad!’ She ended with a sob.

‘Oh, don’t cry, Kate! Frank saw us coming, and; telling Dr. Lorimer to walk on quietly, he hurried to meet us, but unfortunately, he did not keep the path, as he meant to surprise us by starting suddenly from one side. If you had not run to meet him, it would not have happened.’

‘I wish I had fallen down and broken my neck, rather than have done such a thing,’ exclaimed Kate, impetuously.

‘Oh, Kate!’

‘You do not know how dreadful it is!’ said she, sobbing. Nor could all Blanche’s arguments console her. She expressed her intention of going straight to her room and not leaving it while Dr. Lorimer remained at Hollywood.

‘That will never do,’ said Blanche, decidedly. ‘It would be just the way to magnify the affair, and make Dr. Lorimer remember it; whereas, if you pass it off without further notice, he will, as he said, try to forget it. And, besides, papa and mamma, would notice such an unaccountable whim as your keeping your room for days, and would, of course, find out the cause of it. No, no, Katydid, you must face it out bravely. And we had better hurry home, so as to have the first meeting over at tea, instead of waiting until breakfast, which would be much more formidable.’

Sadly were Kate’s lips bitten that night, and for several days afterwards, whenever Dr. Lorimer was present, or even when his name was mentioned. It required all the resolution of which she was mistress, aided by the expostulations and entreaties of Blanche, to induce her to present herself at tea; and constant allusions by Mr. and Mrs. Clerville to the singular

resemblance between Dr. Lorimer and Frank kept her cheeks aglow all the time. She rejoiced unfeignedly when the gentleman's visit was over

CHAPTER XVII.

A PROPOSAL.

The Spring and Summer had passed; Autumn was waning. On a lovely afternoon, in the month of November, Frank and Blanche were riding slowly through one of the beautiful roads that extended in every direction around Hollywood. Both looked grave—almost sad. They had been discussing Kate's approaching marriage. During their summer sojourn in the mountains of a neighboring State, Dr. Lorimer, joining their party, had succeeded, with great difficulty, in overcoming Kate's avoidance of him—and returned home with them her accepted lover. *He* said he attributed her acceptance of his suit to the fact of his being Frank's double. *she* said—'after kissing the man, what can I do but marry him!'

Marry him, it was—in a very few weeks. And so it happened that Blanche and Frank, who had ridden on, leaving the betrothed pair far behind them, fell into uncheerful silence at contemplation of the fact. The prospect of losing Kate was very sad to them. Blanche cried herself to sleep, night after night, in anticipating the happy event, and the loneliness to herself that would ensue; and even Frank's gay spirits rather deserted him at the thought of parting with the little sister who had, from childhood, been his pet darling. Too unselfish to mar Kate's happiness by allowing her to perceive this, they exerted

themselves, in her presence, to appear as usual, and Blanche spoke of and assisted in preparations for the occasion with a cheerful courage that was appreciated only by Frank. But she found it very difficult often to swallow the sobs that wanted to come, and force the smiles that were so far away from their usual place around her lips.

‘It is terrible, this marryng!’ she said, at last, breaking the silence that had continued for some time. ‘Terrible! Almost like losing a friend by death. People change so when they are married. They are not at all the same. But no,’ she added, with something like a shudder ‘no, it is not like death!—for even though they are lost to our daily association, we still know that they are living and happy—and we can see them sometimes.’

‘I never thought before,’ she proceeded, ‘that I had the least jealousy in my nature—but, really, Frank, I feel half ashamed and half inclined to laugh at the spiteful emotions I am tempted to indulge towards Dr. Lorimer. It is very unreasonable, of course, but I am constantly inclined to think—“what business had he to come and break in upon, and break up, our comfort in this way! And how hard it is, that Kate should forsake us for an utter stranger, whom she never saw until a few months ago!” We are dreadfully unreasonable and inconsistent beings!’

‘Yes,’ assented Frank, absently; ‘it is an uncomfortable business, and I see but one remedy for us.’

‘Is there any? What is it—do tell me—for I cannot imagine.’

‘That we follow their example. Marry ourselves.’

Blanche laughed, but not one of her usual mirthful laughs, and shrugged her shoulders. ‘A novel remedy it would be!’ she replied. ‘I cannot say I think the idea looks promising; for, in the first place, where

should we find a demoiselle for you, or a cavalier for myself, either of whom would fit the occasion?"

"You misunderstand me," said Frank, "and seem to forget that we are not within the prohibited degrees. Will you not give me your heart, Blanche?"

She shook her head reprovingly. "It is not right to jest on such a subject, Frank."

"I am not jesting. Why should you think so?"

Uttering an exclamation of astonishment, she turned and looked at him in silence for a moment or two. He smiled.

"Pshaw, Frank, I knew you were jesting! But it really is not right."

He put his hand in his bosom, and drew forth a small rosary. "You have seen this," he said; "my mother gave it to me when I was a child. I hold it in my hand, and tell you that I am in earnest. Are you convinced now?"

Blanche bowed her head reverently. She turned a little pale, and did not speak for some moments. At last she said, in a sort of a hushed tone, "Frank, what put such an idea into your head? It seems very strange to me. Unaccountable."

"Why so? I have long entertained it."

She looked in his face with unfeigned amazement.

"But we do not love each other," she said, simply.

"Do not love each other! why—"

"I mean," interrupted she, "that we do not love each other as people who marry ought to. As Kate and Dr. Lorimer do, or Lucy and Dare-devil."

"I love you, I assure you, and I had really had flattered myself that you reciprocated my regard."

"And so I do, dearest Frank, to its fullest extent, believe me. Never, I am sure, did a sister love her favorite brother more than I love you. But this is

not the sort of love one entertains for the person they wish to marry. At least, it does not seem so to me.'

'Not the sort of love one entertains for the person they wish to marry!' he repeated, looking as curiously at her as she had been looking at him. "You speak with authority, as one who comprehends the subject. Is it practical or only theoretic knowledge that you possess, Blanche?"

'Only theoretic, I assure you.'

'Ah! then I am satisfied. I began to be alarmed: to fear, that some more fortunate man had anticipated me in obtaining a favorable hearing. Since this is not the case, you must take my proposal into consideration, and——' his moustache began twitching as it always did when he was very much amused, and was trying to restrain a laugh, "why do you look so much perplexed? I might almost say, frightened?"

'Because I *am* exceedingly perplexed, and a little bit frightened,' she answered, trying to rally from her stupor of surprise. 'Such a declaration from you is so entirely unexpected, that I can scarcely credit my senses.'

'This is the first time you ever thought of me as a lover?'

'The very first. Kate was suggesting the propriety of our falling in love with each other, one day, and said that everybody expected certainly that we would—but I supposed, at the time, that she was jesting, and the subject has never recurred to my mind since. No—I never, for a moment, thought of you as a lover—as anything but the dearest and best of brothers!'

'Well, I have now the honor to present myself to you in the former character'—he took off his hat, and bowed almost to his horse's mane—'and success to my suit!' he added, waving his hat, as he was about to replace it on his head.

Blanche was silent. Indeed she was bewildered. She was scarcely conscious of what Frank said during the remainder of their ride—or of anything that occurred that evening. Though she talked and laughed, and played, and sang as usual—it was the mechanical faculties alone that were exercised; one single thought had taken possession of her mind—and shaped into words, repeated itself continually—‘Frank wants me to marry him! How strange!’

Sometimes she was half tempted to doubt whether she was not dreaming; if Frank really had made so astounding a proposition. She looked at him thoughtfully. There was not the least difference in his manner, to herself or others—not a shade of consciousness—or even, that she could perceive, of recollection of the matter. But, when bidding her good night, he took her hand, looked at her, smiling gravely, and then whispered, as he kissed her cheek—‘Think of what I said, Blanche.’

She did think of it, the entire night. All the evening she had been longing for the hours of solitude and darkness. Telling Kate that she was very tired, she hurried through her night toilet and her devotions. She could scarcely command her thoughts while performing the last—but found her mind wandering in the most distracting manner—so impatient was it to meet and grapple the subject by which it was exclusively occupied. Kate seemed to her an unconscionable time, in undressing and retiring; but at last the light was extinguished—Kate silent. And now she turned her undivided attention to the consideration of the subject.

Her thoughts were all tumult. She loved Frank—he was the best and noblest, the kindest, most generous of beings!—but—*she was not in love* with him—she did not want to marry him—she was startled

greatly at the idea! Why was she so startled, she asked herself. She supposed she must marry some time. Every one does, nearly. Why not, then, marry dear Frank? She was sure she would be very happy if she did—but—but—somehow she fancied that—perhaps it was silly to think of such a thing, but there was not the least shadow of romance about his love for her, or hers for him—and she had always wished and expected—but, after all, what is romance? People who are not in love call it nonsense. Still, she did wish Frank had not taken such a singular fancy. She had much rather not marry—at least for the present. And in this hum-drum sort of way! But—if Frank insisted upon it, she supposed she must consent.

At this conclusion she heaved a sigh so deep that the sound struck her own ear with a sense of something like terror. ‘What am I sighing at?’ she thought. ‘Why do I feel as if I had parted with an expectation—or resigned—’

She sat up in the bed, and pressing her hands to her cheeks, went on with her mental interrogatory. ‘Why do I blush so in the darkness? I am half afraid to question my own heart—but no; I will not shun the thought that keeps forcing itself on me! I will meet and vanquish it! Dim shadowy things are always terrifying! If this thought is but a shadow, it will dissolve beneath my touch, and trouble me no more. If it be reality—but no—it cannot, shall not be so!

‘Edward! why should his face come up before me!—why should I think of him in connection with this affair? I thought I had gotten over the foolish interest I used to feel about him because I believed he loved me! I know that if I was certain, this moment, I should never see him again, the knowledge would not pain me; while to be separated forever from dear

Frank would be the greatest grief to me. How is it, then, that, loving Frank as I do, I still shrink from marrying him? There must be something in what is called romance, after all; else why should I admire Edward so much more than I do Frank? He is not handsomer—his manners cannot compare to Frank's—he is not half as generous and good! And yet there is a something—or there was, rather—a sentiment attaching itself to him—

• ‘But is it possible I can be thinking of him, when, whatever his sentiments were, (I certainly do believe that he loved me, and that he took my likeness!) he never gave me the least reason to expect—pshaw! I despise myself for wasting a thought on him! I will never do so again! ‘And—yes—I will marry Frank.’

She threw herself back on her pillow, and tried to compose herself to sleep, but in vain. Over, and over, and over again, did all these thoughts pass through her mind. Morning dawned before the drowsy influence fell upon her eyelids. She awoke late, with a consciousness that something had happened; something unusual, and not pleasant. In a moment she remembered what it was. There was one sharply regretful pang—one sigh over the lost dream of her fancy: but the pang vanished in a moment—the sigh ended in a smile. ‘Yes, I will marry Frank,’ she said, ‘if he is satisfied with the quality and degree of affection which I entertain for him. Surely I can learn to love him. I will tell mamma all about it, and see what she thinks.’

She dressed cheerfully, and went down to breakfast.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SETTLING THE MATTER.

It was a rainy day. Kate and Dr. Lorimer were in the drawing-room: Frank announced at breakfast that he had letters to write; and Blanche had a basket full of invitations to Kate's wedding to address. She took them into the library, whither Frank had preceded her, and sitting down opposite him at the table on which he was writing, they both, after exchanging a few words, pursued their different occupations.

Frank had written two letters and was in the middle of a third, when chancing to look over at Blanche, who had a long list of names beside her, it occurred to him that he might lighten her task by reading the names off to her.

'I wish you would,' she replied in answer to his proposal to do so, 'for it is tiresome work thi keeping my attention divided between the list and the basket. But don't you want to finish your letters? I should have demanded your help before, but for thinking you were too busy with them.'

'It makes no difference about them. Where am I to begin?'

'There,' she answered, pointing on the paper. 'Mrs. Carr was the last name I wrote. Take your pen and put a little dash after each one as you give it out to me.'

'For what? Oh, to tell which have been written, I suppose.'

'Yes. Now proceed.'

'Mrs. Compton.'

Scratch, scratch, went Blanche's pen. 'Well,' she said, as she placed the envelope with those already addressed, and took another.

‘Miss Compton.’ Scratch, scratch again. ‘Miss Malvina Compton; Miss Louisa Comp— where is the necessity of sending separate cards to each of these young ladies?’ asked Frank, interrupting himself.

‘Why not just send one to ‘the Misses Compton?’’

‘It is more respectful to send them separate. They cannot come, you know.’

‘Why?’

‘Have you forgotten that poor Mr. Compton died only last month?’

‘True. I had forgotten it. Ogden Conway, Esq.,’ he read from the list. ‘What! have you advanced that cub to—’

‘Go on, go on!’ cried Blanche, laughing, as she wrote and deposited the invitation. ‘He is a pet cub of mine, you know.’

‘Singular tastes women do have in such matters. Robert Conway, Esq.’

‘Well.’

‘Mr. and Mrs. Cranfourd. Sorry to hear they are to be invited.’ They are, without exception, the most disagreeable people I know.’

‘What difference does that make? They would be mortally offended if they were overlooked. Well.’

‘Miss De Witt; Miss Clementina De Witt. What a remarkable habit of giggling that young lady has got! Whatever is said to her, whether laughable or not, she immediately responds with a ‘he, he, he,’ before answering.’

‘Frank, Frank, do quit talking so much! We shall never get through at this rate! Only in the D’s! and just look what an array follows!’

‘If you would take my advice we should get on much faster. I would include them collectively, by families.’

‘That would not do well. There are plenty of

cards; and my time, or yours either, I believe, is not so valuable but that we may take the trouble to individualize. There; go on, do!

Frank made no further remarks until he came to the name of Erasmus Noble, Esq. He paused upon that.

'Blanche, did you acquire your theoretic knowledge of 'the kind of love which one entertains for the person they wish to marry,' from the teachings of this gentleman?'

'No, I did not,' she replied with a blush and slight laugh.

'I am aware that he offered to instruct you in---'

'Mercy on me, I shall have to take the list away from you if you do not stop this running commentary on the unfortunate individuals who are coming under your tongue, and my pen! You must really proceed in a more business like manner. Mrs. Patterson comes next, I believe?'

'Yes. When am I to hear my fate?'

'Not until I have finished here. Do go on! you keep me waiting every time.'

'Have you no consideration for the suspense I am in?—Major and Mrs. Preston. Think of a man's being set down to such work as this, Miss Preston when he is awaiting, with palpitating heart, the decision upon which rests the happiness of—Miss Ada Preston—'

'Does it indeed!' cried Blanche, laughing, and throwing down her pen. 'Do you expect her to break her heart over your inconstancy? Considering your long standing flirtation with her, perhaps she may.'

'The happiness of his whole life, I was about to say, if, with feminine precipitation, you had not interrupted me.'

'You take too long in studying your sentence, Mr. Frank. Why do you not learn your lesson beforehand?'

'Cruel nymph, is that your response to my anxious appeal? I would leave it to any unprejudiced mind, whether a man, who does not pretend to be one of your universal geniuses, with the ability to carry on two or three trains of thought simultaneously, can, or ought to be expected to make love, and read out names at the same time!'

'Why did you attempt it, then?' said Blanche, as gathering up the cards she had addressed, she deposited them in her little silver basket with the others, and sitting it on one side of the table, rose to leave the room.

'You are not going?' exclaimed Frank.

'Yes, I will leave you to finish your letters. Kate can help me with the remainder of these,' she pointed to the basket, 'while Dr. Lorimer and yourself are taking your after-dinner smoke. I am glad I am not a man.'

'Why so? Is it because you are not, as a woman, subject to be tormented by woman, as you are now tormenting me?'

'No. Because I should hate to have to smoke, as almost all gentlemen do--and to be so devoid of patience as most of them are.'

'Stop! do not go! Patience! I think you ought to credit me with possessing a great deal.'

'Perhaps I ought. You certainly have manifested no lover-like impatience for your sentence, before this morning.'

'Seriously speaking, Blanche, I am impatient for the sober certainty of your acceptance. Have you decided yet?'

She sat down again.

‘Frank,’ she said, thoughtfully, ‘are you sure you really wish me to marry you?’

‘Is it possible you can doubt it, after all my assurances?’

‘But why do you wish it? You do not even profess to be in love with me.’

‘I love you.’

‘Is it not strange,’ she asked, ‘that you who have the character of being so susceptible—who used to be always in love with some body or other—should, in this one case, be so cool and rational? It is not flattering to me, I acknowledge.’

‘I might answer you with an aphorism of Bulwer’s—‘He who loves often, loves not all—*id est*, I have loved not at all heretofore. But I have had a character which I did not deserve, for I never was in love in my life. To flirt with pretty women, who permit one that liberty, is not to be in love with, far less to love them.’

‘You distinguish between the two.’

‘Undoubtedly. When I say I love you, I mean that there is not a jarring element between your nature and mine; that I am contented, nay, desirous, to link our lives together, to---why do you shake your head?’

‘This sounds so coldly to me, Frank! *Content!* This is not what I call love. It is *so* cold!’

‘Not cold, but calm. I would do and dare as much for your sake, as the most passionately speaking lover, Blanche; but I have nothing of the restlessness of passion in my character; and you know I never simulate.’

‘But suppose that you are mistaken in thinking—’ she paused.

‘What?’

‘The passion of your nature may be dormant yet, and awaken hereafter, when it is too late.’

‘Upon my word,’ cried he, laughing heartily, ‘that suggestion might sound tolerably in one of the trashy novels that you and Kate waste so much time over; but, for real life, it is rather fanciful—too much so for serious discussion. Indeed, pardon me, I think it would be somewhat trite even in a romance. Blanche, you are the only woman I ever asked to be my wife. Do I ask in vain?’

Her face brightened. ‘You really care for me more than you ever did for any other woman?’

‘More than I ever did for any one whatever!’

She extended her hand. ‘I love you, dear Frank; just as you love me, with deep but passionless affection. I feared this was not sufficient; but, if you are satisfied—’

‘Perfectly so,’ he replied. ‘I salute you as my promised wife.’ And, bending over her, he for the first time pressed his lips to hers.

He seemed determined to conduct his wooing, and all circumstances connected therewith, in the most original manner, for, during the evening of the same day on which he received the troth of Blanche, he announced their engagement in the family circle, to the utter amaze and confusion of his *fiancée*, who had not anticipated so hasty a procedure. The exclamations, questions and expressions of delight which greeted the intelligence were nearly overwhelming. Mr. and Mrs. Clerville were evidently deeply gratified, Kate was in ecstasies, and Dr. Lorimer sympathetically rejoicing.

‘I must write to Dare and Lucy this very night. No one shall have the pleasure of telling them but myself. How delighted they will be! And Edward, too! I will write him a genuine femininely letter

to-morrow morning. He ought to come home to the wedding, as you will persist in putting it off until spring,' said Kate.

Her idea had been that they should be married on the same day as herself, but she was informed by Frank that Blanche and himself had decided differently. He was to employ the winter months in completing his house, which was at present far from eligible for the occupation of his bride, and they would make the fifth of April a day of double importance in the family calendar by celebrating their marriage upon it also.

Kate was mistaken in one of her anticipations. Lucy's delight equalled her expectation; but, from some unaccountable reason, Dare-devil did not participate in the general thanksgiving on the occasion. His grave face and doubtful shake of the head quite shocked Lucy.

Blanche labored, for some time, under a sense of profound astonishment. 'And I am actually engaged to Frank!' she would repeat to herself a score of times daily. She explained to her mother her doubts and fears as to whether she loved Frank well enough to marry him, dwelling upon her ideas of the difference between the affection she entertained for him and the love which—

'The love with which heroines in novels are inspired towards the heroes who exist in the same airy regions, you mean, do you not, my dear?' enquired Mrs Clerville, with a smile, seeing that she hesitated.

'You think me very foolish, mamma; but do you really believe there is not such a thing as love—the kind of love I allude to?'

'I really believe that there is such a thing, and that it generally results in disappointment and unhappiness, from the fact of its being a fanciful, ex-

aggerated sentiment, not sufficiently substantial for every day wear. My dear child, [I think you may safely marry Frank.

CHAPTER XIX.

SADNESS AND SORROW

It was at Guanajuato that Edward had received the news of Lucy's approaching marriage. On their arrival in Mexico, they had proceeded first to that place, and there established their headquarters. From thence they made excursions to the other mining districts of San Louis and Zacatecas, and, finally, an extended tour in California. They had just returned from this tour, and Edward, with more of apprehension than pleasure, beheld an immense package of letters and newspapers which had been accumulating for him during the months of their absence. Among the last communications from home that reached him before leaving Guanajuato, were the letters which informed him of the engagement of Frank and Blanche. He had long expected to hear this, but still^e it was with a sharp pang that his love had bowed its head and given up the ghost. But it was dead! and he cared not to look upon its ashes; wishing it were possible to avoid ever hearing of Blanche again, far more seeing her. He rebuked himself, however, for the weakness of shrinking from a necessary effort, and retiring to the little den which was dignified by the title of his own room, he reluctantly opened his budget.

Alas, and alas! The first letter that met his eye told more disastrous news than wedding cards often

carry. The black seal, the mourning border—it was Death, not Hymen now!

His cheek grew as colorless as the white paper. He gasped for breath. It was Frank's writing on the ominous letter. Who was the victim? His first sickening thought was 'my father!' and so agonizing was this dread, that it usurped every feeling. Instinctively he sank upon his knees, the letter still unopened in his hand, and murmured chokingly: 'Oh God, not him, only not him! and I will not murmur!' He rose with drops of anguish standing on his brow, and sinking into his chair, resolutely tore asunder the paper. An allusion to his father, in the first sentence, relieved his worst apprehension. The sheet dropped from his hand, on the table before him, and he uttered a fervent thanksgiving, while tears streamed from his eyes, tears, which were at first but the burst of joyful relief, but which did not cease, as a glance at the letter again brought back the sick sensations of the moment before. It was not his father, it was not Frank—who was it? Like a picture held up before him, rose the faces, one after the other, of the circle from which death had snatched one member. His sister Lucy's fair pale face, and soft blue eyes—was the face paler still, were the eyes closed forever? Or Dare; the friend for whom he had ever felt scarcely less than a brother's affection; was this generous heart stilled? this 'sun gone down at noon?' Had the cold touch frozen the rose tint in Kate's glowing cheek, and spread over her sparkling eye the haze that would never again unveil its brightness? had the bridal wreath been woven, but to hang upon a tomb? Or was it the kindly mother, whose genial smile and pleasant words came vividly to his remembrance, whose voice was hushed, and whose place was vacant? Or—he covered his eyes with his hand, and tried to

shut out the two faces that rose side by side to his memory and his imagination. The blooming Hebe-like face, with its white smooth brow, delicate fitting color, ingenuous glance, and waving golden curls, that memory painted; the same face—beautiful, still, but with that fearful loveliness that chills the heart to shuddering—white—still—rigid—

He gave almost a bound of desperation, set his teeth hard, and again turned to the letter. But he could not obtain from it the intelligence he sought. It was very brief, Frank merely saying that he had snatched a moment from pressing engagements, to suggest to Edward that it might be a consolation to their father for him, Edward, to return home. His father had not said so, Frank observed. It was a thought of his own. With hurried and trembling hand, Edward tore open letter after letter, and they seemed to him numberless, until after glancing at almost all, he at last found the one he looked for, and learned that his step-mother was dead. Certainly his tears still flowed, certainly he sorrowed sincerely; but yet, there was a deep, if unuttered, thanksgiving that the bolt had not fallen on the sun-bright head!

It did not need Frank's suggestion to determine him on an immediate return home. He remembered, with most painful remorse, the unjust dislike which he had exhibited to the idea of his father's marriage. Now he was anxious to pay every respect to the memory of Mrs. Clerville, which could be demanded of the most dutiful and affectionate son.

It was with great reluctance that he took leave of Mr. Lysle, and still more reluctant was that gentleman to resign his companionship. But regrets being bootless, they shook hands repeatedly, and Edward, mounting the mule on which he was to make the journey to Vera Cruz, proceeded on his way.

His journey was not an agreeable one, for though he had by this time become pretty well accustomed to roughing it, and though, by dint of necessary practice, his servant, Thomas, was now a very tolerable cook, there was one thing connected with Mexican travel to which he had not yet, and was firmly persuaded he never should, become accustomed. This was the sharing his apartment at night with a great many companions of a very diminutive size, whose lively and carnivorous motions, during all the hours of darkness, effectually prevented his indulging, in any comfort, the slumbers to which *they* seemed altogether indifferent. He had reached a small village a few leagues only from Vera Cruz, and wearied by an unusually long day's travel, retired to the wretched room which had been assigned him, hoping that fatigue would enable him to sleep, despite the assaults of his persecutors. But after a short and disturbed slumber of an hour or two only, all somnolent tendency forsook him.

He should soon, now, be at home. He grew exceedingly nervous at the thought. Under any circumstances he should have dreaded to see Blanche; to see her as Frank's wife. And now, overwhelmed with grief, as she must be, at the death of her mother! His courage almost deserted him. Almost he regretted having resolved to return home, and wished that he might abjure it forever. He dreaded, too, the first meeting with his father. Tossing restlessly on his miserably uncomfortable couch, he hailed with relief the first gleam of gold in the eastern sky, which he perceived through a crack in the broken shutter that closed a window just beside his bed. Rising, he hurried out of the close, stifling atmosphere of the small room into the purer air of the morning. He was met at the threshold by old Felipe, his Mexican

guide and courier, with the not very agreeable intelligence that the bay mare was dead lame, and could not possibly travel a league that day. Edward hastened to where the creature was standing, at a little distance from the house, surrounded by half a dozen or so Mexicans, and shrinding and starting in evident pain as Thomas examined one of her fore-feet. It was a favorite animal, which he had bought more than a year before, and wished to take home with him; and he was annoyed in no slight degree to find that he must either make up his mind to be detained, at least for a day or two, or leave the mare. As he was no great judge of horse-flesh, at least of the ills to which it is heir, he did not know whether the lameness was serious or not; but after consulting Felipe, Thomas and his Mexican host, (in neither of whose opinions, however, did he repose much faith!) he decided to wait until the next day; hoping that it might prove to be but of temporary duration.

Little deemed he, when coming to this decision, that the illness of the horse was one of those trifling circumstances on which often hinge very important results. Little deemed he that from this involuntary detention would follow an event by which his whole future life was to be influenced.

Leaving the horse to the medical skill and attentions of Felipe, he wandered away to a little stream which he perceived in the distance, and proceeded to refresh himself with a morning bath. Thomas had a very tolerable cup of coffee awaiting him on his return, with a by no means despicable beefsteak; and to these were added fresh eggs, and the invariable *tortillas*, by his hostess. After partaking all which, he began to look with philosophy upon 'the situation,' which, half an hour before, he had regarded as so vexatious. He might be delayed for some time in

his arrival at home, it was true ; but what then ? He dreaded, far more than desired, the termination of his journey. The detention was unavoidable, and, such being the case, he was quite resigned to endure the inconveniences it entailed. Taking a volume from his traveling library, he again sought the banks of the little rivulet, and stretching himself beneath the shade of a tree, managed to get through the long day not uncomfortably. The difficulty was to achieve the same with the night. All Anglo-Saxon travelers in Mexico are agreed that the aboriginal inhabitants of the sleeping rooms in the hostelrys by the wayside, have a peculiar appreciation of Anglo-Saxon flesh ; or else, are very sanguinely disposed towards these foreign intruders upon them. In vain did Edward, with sublime philosophy, accept the unavoidable torment, and resolve to sleep in despite of it. He was again driven from his uneasy pillow, long before day-dawn. Seating himself on the steps of the door which led from his chamber, he soothed his irritated nerves by a smoke as he watched the rising of the sun. The mare was better this morning, but still not equal to attempting the eight leagues that lay between them and Vera Cruz. There was no help for it ; he must remain another day. As he touched with caressing hand the glossy, arching neck of the beautiful animal, he thought the detention would be well repaid by one radiant smile from the lips of Blanche : for he designed Mexicano (so he had named the mare) as a present to—his brother's wife. (He was schooling himself resolutely to regarding her in this light.)

It was towards the latter part of the afternoon that, returning listless and wearied from his haunt by the streamlet, he perceived a heavy rumbling carriage, such as is used by Mexicans of rank when traveling, approach the inn and halt. A thin, sickly looking

Spaniard alighted and made some inquiries of the host, who turned, and, approaching Edward, informed him that a lady had been taken ill on her journey, and was obliged to stop. There was no room for her reception excepting the one in his occupation. Would he resign it to the lady?

He felt some scruples of conscience in permitting any one, more especially a lady and an invalid, at least unwarned, to encounter the plague he had himself been enduring. Bowing to the stranger, who returned his salutation with the grace and urbanity of a well-born Castilian, he assured him that the room was entirely at the service of the lady, but that, after having occupied, or attempted to occupy it, for two nights, he could not advise her to follow his example. The Spaniard hesitated, but only for a moment. The lady was ill, very ill, he said—totally unable to proceed. He would, therefore, as Edward was so good as to relinquish the apartment, avail himself of his obliging courtesy, and have it prepared for her reception immediately. He bowed, and returned to the carriage, which had halted near by. Speaking a few words to the occupants within, two maids descended instantly. The Spaniard motioned to the other servants, who were numerous, and several pack mules, that had followed the carriage, were led up to the door. With silent alacrity the servants proceeded to prepare the room for their mistress. The few rude articles of furniture which it contained were hastily removed, the floor swept, and a very strong but subtle perfume sprinkled over it. Next a brazier with a few coals was brought and the place ventilated by smoking. When the white vapor, which, so pungently odorous as to be powerfully titillating to the nostrils, had disappeared, and the atmosphere was again clear, the process of purification

was complete. A comfortable travelling bed was unstrapped from the back of one of the mules, and in a short time the place had been so entirely metamorphosed that Edward, could he have seen it, would scarcely have recognized it as the scene of his two nights of involuntary penance.

He had moved away, when, with a profound inclination of thanks, the Spaniard turned from him to see to these arrangements; and seated on a bench at the opposite extremity of the low veranda that ran along the front of the house, he now watched the disembarkation of the invalid from the carriage. She was lifted out slowly and carefully and carried into the inn, and following immediately, a young girl alighted. Her form had all the roundness and grace peculiar to the Southern races. That indescribable and exquisite grace which invests with so resistless a charm the Creoles of every land. Her foot and ankle, accidentally revealed as she stepped to the ground, were of true patrician size and Andalusian mould. But all these charms were absolutely thrown away upon the indifferent gaze of her only beholder. Edward admired neither the exquisitely rounded form, the languid grace, or the unexceptionable foot and ankle. He only thought, as her veil floated partially aside, revealing a glimpse of a dark glancing eye and olive complexion: "How is it possible that any human being can have so little appreciation of the beautiful as to compare the dusk hues of the brunette to the dazzling tints caught from heaven's own skies and sunshine!" That is, the stranger, as a young girl, reminded him of Blanche; but only to suggest a comparison most unflattering to herself.

After the lady had been established in her apartment, the Spaniard joined Edward, and the latter learned, in the course of casual conversation, that

she was a countrywoman of his own, who had married the Spaniard's brother. Having a few months before become a widow, she waited only to make some indispensable business arrangements, and leaving the settlement of the remainder of her affairs in the hands of her brother-in-law, she was now proceeding to her native land; the unsettled condition of Mexico rendering her desirous to escape from a country which was always in the throes of civil convulsion. Don Miguel, her brother-in-law, was accompanying her to Vera Cruz to see her safely embarked for New Orleans, where she was to be met, on her arrival, by her own brother, a Kentucky gentleman.

Edward, though by no means addicted to the squiring of dames—nor partial to that gallant exercise—felt nevertheless constrained, by the inherent sense of chivalrous courtesy of the Southerner, to offer his escort and protection to the lady in their passage across the gulf. He informed the Spaniard that he was himself on his way to New Orleans, and gave him his card, receiving that of Don Miguel in return. The latter thanked him elaborately for his polite and kind offer, saying he would mention it to his sister.

Shortly afterwards the evening meal was announced, and Don Miguel went to enquire whether his niece would join them at table. He returned without her, to Edward's very considerable relief. The repast over, they indulged, in silent companionship, the calming influence of the *cigarito*; and then, with grave civility, parted for the night.

Edward's dormitory was a degree worse than the one he had given up, inasmuch as it was smaller and more confined. But Thomas had taken a lesson from the practice pursued by the Spanish servants. Borrowing the brazier, he gave a triple fumigation to the little cell to which his master was condemned for the

night. Either there was some virtue in the process, or else, o'erwearied by his previous enforced watches, Edward was not easily disturbed. Resigning his material man to the mercy of his insignificant but myriadal foe, he slept soundly.

He was awakened from a deep and dreamless slumber by the voice of his host. With some difficulty this personage succeeded in making him understand that the sick lady—the sick lady—wished to see him. He rose, of course, instantly, dressed himself hastily, and, with no small trepidation, repaired to the room where he had supped the night before, and which adjoined her chamber. Here he was met by Don Miguel, in whose face and manner appeared the most solemn gravity. He apologised in a low tone for having aroused Edward at such an hour, assuring him that nothing but the urgency of the case would have induced him to take so great a liberty, and presume so far upon his good nature. His sister had become increasingly ill, so that before the physician who had been sent for arrived, it was deemed advisable that the priest should be called in. The priest possessed some knowledge of medicine and disease, had pronounced her to be in a dying state, and was now administering the last rites of the Church to her. When this duty was over, she wished to see her young countryman; to—

Don Miguel paused, as, the door opening, the priest appeared at it, and beckoned them towards him. Inquiring if Edward was the person whom the Donna was so anxious to see, he motioned him to enter the room. Edward did so, and approached the bed of the dying woman.

He almost started back, thinking, in the first moment, that she was already dead, so pale, wan, spir-

it was the face before him. Her eyes were closed, and there was an expression of unearthly calm on the countenance, and even pervading the whole form. She lay in an easy and graceful, though statue-like posture—her feet uncovered for the religious rite, and her hands, which were clasped upon her bosom, holding a crucifix. Beside her, on the bed, Edward observed with surprise, was lying the card which he had given to Don Miguel.

The priest said a few words to her in Spanish, and she opened her eyes, fixing them on Edward with something like a smile.

‘My brother informs me, sir—that you—are going to—New Orleans—and—’

She stopped. Her voice was clear and soft, but she spoke with evident difficulty, and Edward hastened to anticipate her request.

‘I expect to cross the gulf, madam, in the first vessel that leaves Vera Cruz after my arrival there, and it will give me the greatest gratification if I can be of service to you in any way.’

‘You are very kind,’ she answered softly. ‘It is not myself—’ she looked up at Don Miguel, who stood on the other side of the bed.

‘She wishes me to explain to you,’ said that gentleman, addressing Edward, ‘that, as the infirmity of my health prevents my encountering a sea voyage, and I cannot, therefore, have the pleasure myself of accompanying my niece, we will accept your kind offer of friendly service, and place her under your care.’ He proceeded to detail briefly the directions for finding out, on their arrival in New Orleans, the uncle of the young lady, to whose charge she was to be consigned; and ended by observing that as she would be attended by two faithful servants, her nurse,

and the nurse's husband, he hoped that the care of the young lady would not be a very onerous one to Edward.

Edward of course assured him that it certainly would not be such, that nothing could give him more pleasure, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. The lady looked at him earnestly while he spoke, and then directing another glance of intelligence to Don Miguel, the latter took up Edward's card from where it lay, and remarked that his sister had recognized the name as that of some acquaintances, for whom, when living in her native land, she had entertained a great esteem. Might he ask if the gentleman was related to Mr. Clerville, of ——— parish, Louisiana?

'I am his son,' answered Edward.

The lady's face brightened. 'I am satisfied to trust my child to your care, then,' she said in a low tone. 'God bless you!' she murmured, and made an effort to extend her hand to him. 'You will—'

'I will care for her and guard her as if she were my sister,' he said, pressing the cold hand.

'God bless you!' she said again, more faintly. 'Let Ximena come to me now, brother.'

Don Miguel hurried out of the room to seek his niece, and Edward, too, left the chamber. Totally disinclined to sleep, he went into the veranda, and, as he walked to and fro, looked out on the pale moonlight, a scene and circumstances which he had not thought of for years, came with startling vividness to his memory. His mother's death, with all the associations of desolate, awesome feeling which had so oppressed his childish sense. He thought, too, of the latter grief which had again shrouded the same household in mourning—the death of his step-mother. This reverie and the stillness of the night was broken by a solemn sound. From the little church, oppo-

site to the inn, pealed the notes of the passing bell; that touching call which the Church makes to all her children who hear it, to offer up a prayer for the soul that is departing—the soul that is wrestling in agony with the Angel of Death!

Edward crossed himself devoutly, as he uttered the short and simple prayer, for the agonizing, which had been taught to him by his mother, when he stood lisping beside her knee.

When the golden light of the morning glowed in the eastern sky, Ximena was an orphan.

CHAPER XX.

“HOME AGAIN”

It was night when Edward and his party reached New Orleans. As they approached the wharf and the bustle of arrival grew louder and louder on board, he felt half inclined to despair of a safe debarkation of the persons and property of which he was the embarrassed protector. First, there was the young lady and her servants to be disposed of. He must take her to the St. Charles hotel, where he hoped to find General Walworth, her uncle, to whom he should be happy to resign his charge. He had the painful task to perform of announcing to that gentleman that his sister was no more. This, his first and worst difficulty, over, he must return to the boat and see to the tons of baggage that accompanied Miss Yarassa. He had a list as long as his arm, which had been given him by Don Miguel, of trunks, boxes, packing cases!—there was no end to them! He wondered if it would be possible to get them all landed that night, and what he must do with them after they were landed.

Then Mexicano—and his own luggage! How would Thomas be able to attend to both! He was afraid he should have to look after the trunks himself, while the servant took care of the horse.

As he revolved these troubling anticipations in his mind, the steamer was made fast to the wharf. He despatched Thomas for a carriage, and went himself to announce to Miss Yarassa that their voyage was ended, and to request her to prepare for leaving the boat. His hand was a little unsteady as he knocked at the door of the ladies' cabin. It was the first time he had asked admittance there. Every day punctiliously he had inquired of her maid as to Miss Yarassa's health and comfort—desired his compliments to her—and requested to know if she required anything, or if he could be of service in any way; but he had not seen her once since they left Vera Cruz. As she was the only lady passenger, she had had the cabin all to herself, with the attendance of her maid and the stewardess. Juanita, the maid answered his knock, and requested him to walk in—but her young lady was not visible. Edward sat down while the maid went into one of the state-rooms to announce his presence to her mistress.

Ximena came forth almost immediately, and, approaching, gave him her hand. 'You wanted to see me?' she asked simply.

He explained; and assenting to his suggestion, that as it was growing late—it was now past eleven o'clock—it would be well for her to land at once, she requested Juanita to get her mantle and bonnet. Her manner surprised Edward; it was so quiet and self-possessed. She was very pale, but her face was perfectly composed; with no signs of weeping or marks of distress about it. She had seemed stunned by her mother's death. From the moment that all hope was

over, her wild grief was stilled; she grew cold and passive; beheld, apparently unmoved, the preparations for the removal of her mother's body, which was to be taken back to their late home for interment beside that of her husband; received her uncle's farewell, when he took leave of her on board the vessel, with unconscious indifference, and since then had scarcely spoken a word or noticed the efforts of the faithful Juanita to rouse her from a lethargy which alarmed her attendant. She reclined in her berth, seldom even changing the position in which she had first placed herself, occasionally swallowing, distastefully, a few morsels of the food pressed on her by Juanita, but more frequently declining it by a silent motion of the hand. Juanita had been not less surprised than delighted at the readiness with which she had answered Edward's request to see her, and now prepared to accompany him to the hotel. He left her in the carriage for a few minutes, while he went to procure rooms, then returned and conducted her into the house.

'I thought, Miss Yarassa,' he said, as they followed a servant up a flight of stairs, 'that you would prefer to retire immediately. I will myself call on General Walworth at once, if, as I presume, he is in the house, and inform him of your arrival, and you can see him as early to-morrow morning as you wish.'

'Thank you,' answered Ximena, and her lip quivered slightly. 'Yes, I had rather not see him until the morning.' The servant who conducted them here stopped and threw open a door.

'Good night,' said Edward, as Ximena withdrew her hand from his arm, and was about to enter the apartment. 'My room is just opposite. If you should need anything, or wish to speak to me, your maid can summon me in a moment.'

'Good night. You are very kind, said Ximena. She turned away.

He went to enquire about her unele. The clerk, on consulting his book, told him that there was no General Walworth in the hotel. There was an A. H. Walworth, and a George D. Walworth. Perhaps one of these was the gentleman he was in search of. Edward took out his note-book to be certain as to the name. No; he was afraid not. The name was *General Amherst Walworth*. The clerk suggested that the gentleman might possibly have left off his title, and put in his middle name, thus causing a difference of address. Edward did not think this likely under the circumstances; but it was easy to ascertain whether it was so. Obtaining the number of A. H. Walworth's room, he proceeded thither, accompanied by a servant, to whom he gave his card, desiring him to knock at the door, take the card into the gentleman, and say that he wished to speak to him for a moment on very particular business, if he had not retired. A crack of light under the door showed that there was a light burning in the room, so that Edward felt no hesitation about intruding.

The first knock of the servant received no attention. He knocked again.

'What do you want, and be d——d to you?' was the civil demand from within.

'Here's a gentleman wants to see you on very particular business, sir,' responded the servant.

'I never do business at twelve o'clock at night, tell the gentleman,' was the cool reply.

Edward smiled, as it occurred to him for the first time that it would, perhaps, have been more sensible to have deferred his search until the next-day, but he concluded that he might as well satisfy himself as to

whether this was the man he sought; so he said to the grinning servant :

‘ Ask him if he is General Walworth, of Kentucky?’

‘ The gentleman says, is you General Walworth, of Kentucky?’ bawled the servant.

There was no verbal answer; but there was the sudden movement of a chair, as if some one had risen hastily—a step passed across the room, the door was unlocked and opened with a jerk, and a young man, with light disordered hair, flushed face, and altogether a very dissipated look, stood before Edward in frowning impatience.

Now Edward, though very shy with women, had never been troubled with the least diffidence towards any one of his own sex; and as A. H. Walworth’s glance met his quiet eye, and rested on the half smile of his lip, that gentleman’s manner modified itself considerably. In the same instant, Edward himself recollected that some apology was due for his mistake and untimely intrusion. He therefore bowed, begged pardon for having disturbed Mr. Walworth, in consequence of a misapprehension, the nature of which he briefly explained, bowed again and retired to his chamber, satisfied that he had better delay all further inquiries concerning General Walworth until he could prosecute them to more advantage. It was possible, he reflected, that he had mistaken the hotel at which the General was to meet his relatives. The name, he was sure, he had right, as he had taken a note of it at the time. He supposed he should be able to find him out in the morning. It would be decidedly embarrassing if he did not. What, in that case, could he do with the young lady? He went to sleep pondering this question.

The first thing he did next morning, after dressing, was to send and inquire about Miss Yarassa’s health,

and ask at what hour he should be in attendance to accompany her to breakfast. This was really very well in a young gentleman who had never before so much as asked a young lady to dance, far less to go to breakfast with him. He smiled as this thought occurred to himself, while waiting for the answer to his message; and to beguile the time, walked up to the looking-glass and gave an additional brushing to the glossy waves of his dark hair, remarking, for the first time, that he was much sunburned. Leaning toward the mirror, he scanned his face closely, then began to brush his beard hard and fast. It was a beard to be vain of! Black, curling, and very thick. He had long worn a moustache; but this beard was of Mexican growth, and, like all Mexican vegetable productions, of tropical luxuriance. Before he had finished arranging it to his satisfaction, Thomas returned. Miss Yarassa's compliments and thanks—she was quite well, but would breakfast in her own room. A most judicious and commendable proceeding, her proposed escort thought. He had been ransacking his brains for half an hour for something to say to her at table. As she was a foreigner, the peculiarities of climate and the customs of the Crescent City were, perhaps, the most prominent subject for conversation. He had concluded to ask her if she had ever seen as damp a day before; intending to inform her, then, that the days were often, in fact generally, extremely damp in New Orleans; that it was a delightful city, but bad climate; that there are only two feet of mud before you come to the water—in consequence of which, people are buried, not in the ground, but on top of it—but no: he remembered that a detail of this kind was not very well suited to the breakfast table. He must think of something else. Happily, the entrance of Thomas, with the

message above mentioned, relieved him of the puzzling necessity. He went down and took his own breakfast; after which he set out again in search of General Walworth, of Kentucky.

No information could be obtained of that gentleman's whereabouts. He was at none of the principal hotels in the city, nor had been for a month past. With exemplary patience did Edward prosecute his enquiries—question clerks and examine their books. He ventured to intrude a second time upon A. H. Walworth, hoping to obtain from that gentleman some intelligence of his namesake. But, though Mr. Walworth's reception of him was more courteous and obliging than it had been the night before, he could not afford him the information he asked. He was a Georgian, not a Kentuckian, he said, and had no relation or acquaintance of the name Edward mentioned. Equally ignorant was George D. Walworth, to whom he also applied.

Hours had been consumed in his fruitless researches—in driving about from one hotel to another, and conning over pages of names—when he suddenly remembered that Miss Yarassa must be surprised at hearing nothing of either her uncle or himself all day. He had forgotten, too, to write, as he intended, to his father or Frank, to let them know that he had landed and would soon be at home. And—what an oversight!—he had totally forgotten about Miss Yarassa's mountain of luggage. Before leaving the boat the night before, he had learned from the captain that this could be attended to the next morning—but morning was long passed. It must be six o'clock, he thought. Taking out his watch, he touched the spring of the case, and, as it flew open, was very much relieved to find that it was only four. But this was late enough. Should he attend first to the lady

or the luggage? The lady, he presumed—and stepping into his job coach, drove to the St. Charles. But the luggage weighed heavily on his mind, and just as he was about to enter the hotel, he bethought him that his best plan would be to hand his list to a commission merchant, and have the things bestowed in his ware-rooms until the missing man appeared to claim them and their owner. Re-entering the coach, he went incontinent and discharged his conscience of this task—then returned, with lightened responsibility, to the hotel.

Sending for Juanita, he begged to see Miss Yarassa in the ladies' parlor, near to which was her room, and where he waited, and waited a considerable time, he thought. But at last the dark-eyed maiden came. Slowly, with languid step, she entered; and, somewhat to his relief, but much more to his surprise, did not seem to think it a matter of any moment that her uncle was not to be found. She evinced not the least impatience, embarrassment or concern at a circumstance which Edward could not but think was well calculated to excite all three of these emotions, but looked at him and listened to his relation of his efforts and failures with an air of well-bred indifference.

'Strange!' thought Edward. 'Is she so childish, or so ignorant as not to understand the thing at all? It seems so?' Then again addressing her:

'Perhaps I had better telegraph Gen'l Walworth,' he said. 'He may have mistaken the time at which he was to meet you, and be still at home. Will you give me his address, if you please—the name of the place where he resides?'

He took out his tablets.

'Verdevale is the name of his place. He lives in the country.'

‘What is the name of the nearest town?’

‘I do not remember.’

‘His post-office?’

‘Verdevale, — county, Kentucky.’

‘— county? I had perhaps better telegraph to Louisville, making inquiries?’

‘If you like.’

Edward put up his tablets. He was was amazed at her perfect unconsciousness, or *nonchalance*—he did not know which it was—in so awkward a position.

‘I wonder if the man is a myth?’ he ejaculated mentally, ‘and if this pretty insensible is to be left on my hands altogether? What am I to do with her?’

He glanced at her again. She was looking straight before her, evidently forgetful of his presence, and the expression of her large dark eye was so mournful that the half-sentiment of impatience which had been excited by what he considered her stupidity was instantly checked by a gush of generosity and pity. For the first time he felt, what almost any other man would have felt long before, a sense of protection and proprietorship towards the lonely and lovely girl thus accidentally entrusted to his care. And, after all, he thought, as he still looked at her pale impassive face and sad unmoving gaze—after all, how much more sensible and less troublesome to him this quiet and undemonstrative manner of taking the disappointment than would be the noisy excitement which most women and girls would display, he supposed, on such an occasion. It was with a gentleness as well as kindness that he said, as he rose to leave her: ‘At all events, Miss Yarassa, I hope you will not give yourself the least distress or uneasiness. Nothing is more probable than that your uncle has mistaken the time appointed. He may ar-

rive to-night. I have an engagement at present, but will return and attend you to dinner, unless,' he added, 'you prefer dining in your own room.'

'Yes, I prefer it.'

He bowed and withdrew; went to his chamber and wrote his letter. Explaining briefly the cause of his detention, he told his father he would be at home—

Here he paused and threw down his pen to consider. If General Walworth did not appear the next day or the day after, he would wait no longer, he believed, but must, yes, he must take Miss Yarassa home with him. That would certainly be better than remaining at the hotel, though it would be very disagreeable and embarrassing to her, he feared. He knew it would be so to himself. Perhaps she might object to going, and wish him to take her on to Kentucky. He hoped not, and thought not—she seemed so passive and indifferent. Altogether, it was a— a very unpleasant dilemma in which he was placed.

He resumed his pen, and continued his sentence—would be at home on Saturday. It was possible that the young lady might accompany him, as there seemed little prospect of finding her uncle. If Frank was at home, of course he would be at the landing to meet him.

Sealing and addressing the letter, he rang for Thomas to take it to the post-office. Thomas was not forthcoming. He suggested to his master that, after being cramped up on shipboard, Mexicano needed exercise, and, Edward assenting, he was now out on that errand. Edward was about to give the letter to the servant who had answered his ring, but as he wished it to go without delay, thought it would be best to send it to the office by Thomas when he came, instead of risking its being detained by some carelessness, as a letter of his had been once before at

that same place. He therefore put it into his pocket, and never thought of it again.

He was tired--more tired in mind than in body--by his bootless perambulations. He rose and went out to the nearest book-store to look for some refreshment; nor was he long in finding it, but soon took back with him to his room a companion in whose eloquent discourse he lost all recollection of the annoyances of the day. Miss Yarassa, his return home, the dinner hour, were all forgotten, as he sat absorbed in his volume. The 'wee sma hours' were upon him ere he closed the page and sought his pillow.

On telegraphing to Louisville the next day for information, he learned that there certainly was such a man as General Walworth, but that he lived in the interior of the State, no line of telegraph passing near him. Edward wrote immediately to the address which Ximena had mentioned, apprising him of the death of his sister, and whereabouts of his niece. As he still entertained some hope that he might be on his way to New Orleans, a little behindhand in his appointment, Edward stayed out the time he had prescribed to himself; but, on the evening of the third day of his waiting, he asked an interview with his charge, and proposed to her to accompany him home, for the present. He blushed and stammered in making the proposition. She heard it with perfect composure, and assented without a word of apology, or shade of confusion.

There are few persons who have not, once or twice in their lives at least, paused and (mentally) given themselves a shake, with the question, 'Am I awake, or am I dreaming?'

Never was man more disposed to make to himself this interrogatory than was Edward, as he walked

the deck of one of the floating palaces that steam up and down the Mississippi river, watching each familiar feature of the landscape as they passed along.

Here was he—he, Edward Clerville—the protector and traveling companion of—a young lady! It was really incredible! He was tempted to doubt his own identity! *A young lady!* And such a young lady! So quiet and matter of course in her manner of receiving his attention that he could not blame any one for taking her to be his wife, as he perceived that everybody did. Not the slightest symptom about her of that little flutter and consciousness which most young ladies would have exhibited. If she had been eight instead of eighteen, and he seventy instead of twenty-five, she could not have been more composedly trusting and simple in her air towards him. No wonder that he had been greeted with congratulations on his marriage by two acquaintances, fellow passengers, who saw him come on board with Miss Yarassa leaning upon his arm, and followed by her servants, his servant and horse, and their united array of trunks. Quite a family party they undoubtedly looked! The mistake too, was the more pardonable and natural, since no friend or acquaintance of his would ever have thought of suspecting him of the gallantry of escorting any lady but his sister or wife. This was neither one of his sisters—it must be his wife, they thought, and made their compliments accordingly, being of the opinion that the possessor of so beautiful a wife deserved to be congratulated. Edward was not very gracious in his reception of their congratulations. In very few words he rectified their misapprehension. Really, he hoped he should never be so situated again.

They were approaching the home landing, and he hastened to the fore part of the boat, gazing eagerly

toward the bluff that stood out boldly against the eastern sky, expecting to see his brother and the carriage. Neither was visible. It was strange. Surely his letter must have been received in time. With a sudden misgiving he put his hand into his breast pocket, and there it was! Drawing it forth with a muttered obijuration at his own careless forgetfulness, and the habit which Thomas had of being out of the way just when he was most wanted, Edward twisted the unoffending paper into the likeness of a cigar, and threw it into the water. As there was no signal for the boat to stop, she held on her way up the river.

A flush of vexation mounted to Edward's brow as he thought of the annoyances he must encounter in landing at Scarsborough. He was well known there, and, like all small towns, it was a gossiping place. The people who chanced to see him would be sure to participate in the mistake by which he had already been made so uncomfortable. He should be stared at, spoken to, and talked about with real village gusto, he knew. Not Benedick himself, before his magnanimous reformation of sentiment, had a more unmitigated horror of being called 'the married man,' than our unfortunate hero now entertained for that appellation. He groaned in spirit—but, with true Southern courage, resigned himself to meet the occasion. As they would soon reach Scarsborough, he had all the party ready for instant debarkation. If he could only avoid the least detention there! Thomas received his orders in advance; and on leaving the boat, Edward drew his wide-rimmed Panama hat far over his brows, with a faint hope that this precaution, together with the heavy beard under it, might prevent his being recognized. He walked slowly up the bluff to the hotel, with Miss Yarassa, and entered the parlor to wait for the carriage he had

ordered. It was at the door in less than fifteen minutes—and he ought surely to have been satisfied with such unusual expedition. But he had not, in the meantime, escaped notice. His face was aflame with confusion, and his manner very forbiddingly haughty, as he led Miss Yarassa to the carriage, handed her in, and, following with all convenient speed himself, drove away, leaving Thomas to provide for the conveyance of the rest of the party.

He leaned back in his corner, and glanced over at his fair companion as she reclined in hers, curious to discover whether she had observed and understood the smiles and looks so intelligible to himself. It was plain that she had not. She was as pale and unmoved as usual. By this time he had grown to consider her as a breathing automaton, upon whom words would be wasted. Their drive of ten miles passed in absolute silence. He was thinking of the changes that had occurred since he left home. It was less than two years, and yet how great were these changes! Lucy, Kate, Frank, all married—and his step-mother dead! And Blanche! he could meet her now, as the wife of his brother, with composure. His ill-starred love troubled him no more. But, looking back in the calm spirit with which we can regard things that are of the past, he rejoiced that he had checked it in its early growth by absence, and that a sense of moral right, as well as of honor towards his brother, had enabled him later to conquer it entirely, for he felt that it had been, that it would ever remain the one passion of his life. Had it taken firmer root in his heart, he might have been a miserable man. As it was, though he knew that he could never love again, that his life must be a cold, ungenial one, he thought he could wed himself to his books, and should not be unhappy. He was very

agreeably surprised to find that, instead of dreading the arrival at home the more, the more nearly it approached—as he expected he would—the idea had lost nearly all its terror. Before leaving Mexico, he shrank at the bare thought of meeting his father—seeing Blanche! Distance sometimes lends terror, as well as enchantment, to the view.

The carriage stopped before the door of Hollywood. Descending, he assisted Ximena to alight, and led her into the house.

CHAPTER XXI.

RE-ACTION.

They had left Scarsborough late, and it was now sometime after dark. The hall door was open—the lamp burning—everything looking just as usual. And yet Edward felt the change. There was a stillness, an air indescribable, but oppressive, hanging over the place. No one had heard their approach, it seemed, as not even a servant came to meet them. Edward crossed the hall, passed through a corridor, and stopped a moment at the sitting-room door. It was open, and he could look in on the family so reduced in numbers since he had joined them last around the table where they now sat at tea. Only three—his father, Frank and Blanche!

Mr. Clerville's back was to the door, and Edward's eye rested but an instant on the familiar form, which, as he saw it, looked unaltered, and passing Frank with a slight momentary glance, paused at the opposite end of the table. Blanche? Was it really Blanche sitting there, he asked himself. Coming out of the darkness, he could not see very distinctly, but this

seemed to him a stranger. While he involuntarily shaded his sight to obtain a clearer vision, a slight movement of Ximena's, as she stood beside him, recalled his wandering thoughts. Without allowing himself time for further hesitation, he entered the room.

Blanche saw him first. At her slight exclamation, Frank looked up, and rose quickly from the table, and Mr. Clerville, turning his head and perceiving him, started up too. Ximena remained standing near the door as Edward hastened forward to meet them. A few broken words were interchanged as they grasped each other's hand—and then Edward turned to Blanche. She had risen, and stood, her hand extended, as he approached. Neither spoke. The sight of her pale face and black dress shocked Edward inexpressibly; and as she felt the convulsive trembling of his hand, she could scarcely maintain the forced composure for which she was struggling. Edward bent his head over her hand, and his tears fell upon it, as he pressed it to his lips. It was the mute assurance of his sympathy in her sorrow—for all this moment there was no thought, even in his heart, save for the kind mother who was gone.

Mr. Clerville and Frank both glanced at Ximena, and the former took a step towards her, saying to Edward—

‘Have you brought me another daughter, my son? Then let me welcome her home.’

‘Oh! pardon me!’ exclaimed Edward, quickly. ‘No, father; this young lady—’ he hurried to her side, and said, ‘Allow me to present to you my father—my brother.’ Scarcely giving either party time to acknowledge the introduction, he took Ximena's hand and turned to Blanche, who had advanced. ‘I have brought you a guest, Blanche,’ he managed to

stammer out, 'whom I am sure—' he ended his sentence by placing the passive hand he held in that of Blanche, who pressed it very cordially, murmured some words of welcome, and drew Ximena to a chair, saying gently, 'Sit down and let me take off your bonnet.'

Ximena submitted without opposition, and Blanche removed her bonnet and mantle, while Edward shook hands with the two servants who were in attendance; inquired if the other servants were well; answered his father's questions as to when he had landed in New Orleans, alluding slightly to his detention there, but without mentioning the cause of it, and explained about the letter which he had written, but forgot to send. He glanced toward Ximena as he spoke—by which they understood that the detention and the letter had both something to do with her. Chairs were placed for them at table, and they all sat down.

Blanche, Mr. Clerville and Frank exerted themselves to talk easily and naturally, in order to prevent all sense of constraint or awkwardness on the part of the beautiful stranger whom Edward had brought home with him; marveling much, the while, where or how he could have picked up such a traveling companion. She was not his wife; was she his betrothed? It did not look so. There were no glances of intelligence, nor even a word exchanged between them. Edward seemed to have forgotten her very existence, as he sat absently stirring his coffee and looking intently at Blanche. The young lady herself was apparently unaware of the peculiarity of her position. Her manner was quiet and unembarrassed; and she answered when spoken to in a low, sweet voice, but there was a dreamy abstraction of air about her, and she never once smiled.

Blanche observed that she wore the deepest mourning.

‘Let me give you another cup of coffee,’ she said, as Ximena made the slight movement of her plate, which signified that the ceremony of eating was over with her. A ceremony it had literally been; she had scarcely tasted a mouthful. ‘Pray take a hot waffle!’

‘Nothing more, thank you.’

‘But you do not eat at all. You ought to be hungry after traveling’—all day she was going to add, but recollected that she did not know how long she had been traveling, or where she came from, or where she was going, or even what her name was! Edward had actually forgotten or neglected to mention this last indispensable part of an introduction! Blanche mentally echoed Kate’s opinion, that he was the strangest person she ever saw in her life.

Despite her efforts and those of Mr. Clerville and Frank, conversation languished. In fact, none of them knew what to talk about. Edward seemed to avoid speaking of Mexico, they all noticed. He was almost as silent as Ximena. Shortly after tea was over, Blanche asked her guest if she would like to retire, and Ximena answering affirmatively, they left the room. Summoning the maid, Blanche led the way up stairs into the chamber next her own, glanced around to see that every thing was in order, and said, as she took Ximena’s hand to bid her good night—

‘Jenny will bring you any thing you want, Mi—’

She broke off the word in the middle. How excessively strange and careless of Edward not to have mentioned the lady’s name! and how very awkward and discourteously it sounds to address any one without naming them, she thought! She endeavored to make up for this deficiency in speaking, by the gentleness and cordiality of her voice and manner.

Pressing Ximena's hand kindly, she added, 'Perhaps you would like Jenny to stay in this dressing-closet adjoining? She can do so if you wish it.'

'Thank you. Juanita, my maid, has not come yet, then?'

Blanche looked at Jenny, enquiringly.

'I don't know, m'm,' Jenny replied to the look. 'The man that drove Mass Edward from Scarsborough said that Thomas and—'

'Go and see whether they have come yet,' interrupted Blanche.

Ximena had seated herself in an arm-chair, and was reclining back in an attitude of weary lassitude. She looked so young, so sad! and youth and sadness suit not well together! that, with a sudden emotion of sympathy and pity, Blanche bent over and kissed the pale brow. The act seemed to rouse Ximena. She looked up with earnest attention at Blanche's face and then took her hand.

'I am so miserable!' she said, with touching simplicity.

Blanche did not know what to say; but she pushed back the dark locks from the forehead which, though so pale, was hot and throbbing, and, stooping, again pressed her lips to it.

Ximena seemed about to speak, when the door opened and the servant re-entered the room.

'They have not come yet, Miss Blanche,' she said.

'Very well, I will ring when I want you, Jenny,' replied her mistress.

'Yes, m'm.'

She looked with curiosity toward Blanche and the stranger as she left the chamber. The former drew a foot-stool to Ximena's side, and sat down—resting her clasped hands on the knee of the latter. The hearts of the two girls were instinctively drawn to-

ward each other, but they were silent. Ximena spoke first.

‘You are his sister?’ she asked.

‘You mean—’

‘Edward’s. You call him Edward, I thought.’

‘Yes—that is his name,’ answered Blanche, wondering at her ignorance on the subject.

‘And you are his sister?’

‘Not his own sister?’ replied Blanche in a faltering tone.

‘His brother’s wife?’

‘No:—his step sister.’ Tears sprang to her eyes.

‘Are you, too, unhappy?’ said Ximena. ‘Ah, yes—you, too, wear this dress!’—she touched her own mourning robe with a shudder. ‘What is the matter? Why do you weep?’

Blanche’s tears gushed forth. She had been battling bravely with her emotion ever since Edward came. His presence recalled so forcibly the time immediately following her mother’s marriage, when he was at home, that it had required all the resolution which she could command to avoid yielding to it before Ximena’s questions, which could not be answered without allusion to her great grief—quite vanquished her hardly sustained fortitude. She covered her eyes with her handkerchief, and wept unrestrainedly for a few minutes. The Spanish girl watched her in silence—with a sort of wonder—until Blanche, relieved by the indulgence, and feeling that some apology was due for it said:

‘Excuse me. You must think this strange—but I could not restrain my tears. It is but a few months since my mother—’ her voice failed.

‘She is dead?’ asked Ximena, with strange calmness.

Blanche bowed her head, and her tears flowed afresh.

‘But how can you weep so?’ exclaimed Ximena in a tone of surprise—almost of envy. ‘I cannot weep: I have not shed a tear since my mother died!’

Blanche pressed her hand.

‘I am so weary—weary!’ continued the poor girl mournfully. ‘If I could but go to sleep, and never wake again! But I am very young. I fear I shall live a long time. Do you think it a sin to pray for death?’

Before Blanche could answer, Ximena’s eye accidentally fell upon the jet rosary which the former wore depending from her girdle—and which she had taken in her hand while Ximena was speaking. Evidently some sudden thought or association was suggested to the young Spanish girl by the sight of this rosary. Her lips trembled—and there was an expression of troubled thought in her eye: of doubt or apprehension. At this moment a low knock at the door was followed immediately by the entrance of Jenny, accompanied by Juanita. Acknowledging the respectful salutation of the woman, as she advanced towards them, Blanche rose from her lowly seat, thinking that Ximena would probably wish now to retire. She turned to say good-night—but Ximena had started forward eagerly, and spoke a few words rapidly, in Spanish, to her maid, who answered hesitatingly, and with an air of deprecation.

‘Give it me! give it me!’ cried her young mistress, in English. ‘Give me my mother’s rosary!’

Unwillingly, as it seemed, Juanita produced it from among the folds of the kerchief that covered her bosom. Ximena caught it with hurried hand, and held it up to the light. It was of lapis lazuli, set in gold, and sparkled in the rays of the lamp as it swayed to and fro in her trembling fingers. But it was not the beauty of the gems, or the glitter of the gold, that

the young orphan saw as she gazed upon it! With a sudden low cry of anguish she sank on her knees, and clasped the precious relict to her heart; and then the passion of grief which had so long been prisoned, as it were, within her breast, burst forth with fearful violence. She fell forward upon the floor, writhing convulsively. Her tears had come at last, and they came in storm! Her weeping, compared to that of Blanche's, was like the tornado of the tropics to a gentle summer shower.

Blanche knelt down on the floor beside her, her own tears falling like rain drops over the raven locks now so wildly disheveled—and the black-robed, writhing form—and strove to calm the frightful vehemence of her sorrow; Juanita mingled her sobs with the convulsed gaspings of her nurseling; and Jenny stood with parted lips and half frightened stare, regarding the stranger in shocked amazement. The orphan refused to be comforted, and her broken, despairing exclamations touched Blanche to the very soul—speaking, as they did, of a sorrow so like her own. After more than an hour of futile endeavor to soothe the passionate woe, she remembered that her failing to return down stairs would excite surprise: She rose, therefore, and whispering to Juanita that she would soon be back, beckoned to Jenny and glided from the apartment.

'Wait here until I return, Jenny,' she said to the girl in a low tone, pausing a moment at the door of her own chamber. 'Get me a wrapper to put on—and my slippers—and go and tell Mom Hannah to have the bed in the dressing-closet fixed for this woman. Help her yourself, and get it done as quickly as possible. But don't go through that room;'—she pointed to Ximena's chamber. 'The outer door of the dressing-closet is unlocked, is it not?'

'Yes m'm—I think so.'

'See!—quick, Jenny.'

The girl hurried down the passage, tried the lock of the door and soon returned.

'Yes m'm—its open.'

'Well—don't forget now. Tell Mom Hannah to come immediately. And let her put a blanket on the bed. These people are used to a much warmer climate than ours. Oh! and I want some coffee—about twelve or one o'clock. Mom Letty need not sit up to make it. John can do it. And you stay in my room. I may want you during the night. Now don't go and forget half I have told you, Jenny! Do you think you can remember it all?'

Oh, yes, Miss Blanche. Where is the man to sleep, Mom Hannah says?'

'The man?'

'Yes m'm. There's a man down stairs, too. I think Thomas said he was the woman's husband.'

'Let the room next the pantry be prepared for him. Now get my things—the wrapper, I mean, and slippers—and put the wrapper on the bed where I can find it. And then see about the rooms. The woman has had tea, of course?'

'No m'm,' answered Jenny, shaking her head. 'I wanted her to wait for some, but she wouldn't. She talked some outlandish way that I didn't understand; and then she said something about her "chile," so I thought she must mean the young lady, and I brought her right up.'

'And you must take her right down again, directly, to get some supper. But wait until I come back. She could not leave the young lady now. She was her nurse, I suppose, and seems very much attached to her. Is that all, now? It seems to me there was something else—'

She stood still a moment to think.

‘She aint Mass Edward’s wife, sure enough, is she, Miss Blanche?’ enquired Jenny.

‘No; certainly not.’

‘I knew Thomas was telling a story! He said Mass Edward was married to her week before last—or last week, I forget which—before they left Mexico; but it was to be kept a secret—’ here Blanche, who had scarcely heard the commencement of Jenny’s sentence, turned round, and listened with an expression of surprise and doubt, as the girl continued—‘but I thought it vëry strange that Mass Edward should be sitting down stairs there so quiet, and her going on so up here, if she was his wife!’

Blanche could not forbear a smile, while at the same time there had been something so very unusual about the whole affair—Edward’s sudden and unexpected appearance, thus accompanied—that for a moment the question did occur to her whether what Thomas said might not be true. But she instantly reflected that it was impossible Edward should act in so insincere a manner towards his father—and—pshaw! how could she credit it for a moment!

‘And pray, did your Mass Edward give Thomas leave to tell you this secret, that is to be kept from every one else?’ she said, walking quickly down stairs, followed by the servant.

‘Oh, he told all of the servants, as well as me; but he said the white folks wasn’t to know of it.’

Blanche smiled again as she turned into the corridor which led to the sitting-room.

CHAPTER XXII.

TREMORS AGAIN.

As soon as Blanche and Ximena had retired, Edward explained to his father and Frank the chance circumstances by which Ximena had been thrown upon his protection—enquiring of the former if he remembered having been acquainted with the young lady's mother.

'What did you say the name was?' asked Mr. Clerville.

'Yarassa.'

'Her maiden name, I mean.'

'Walworth, I suppose. That is the name of her mother, whom I could not find.'

'Walworth! repeated Mr. Clerville. Oh, yes, I recollect now. Miss Walworth! She was a school-mate of your mother's, I think. At least, a friend of hers. I remember. Her parents were very much opposed to this marriage; not from any objection to Yarassa himself, I believe, but because they naturally objected to his living in Mexico. I think I heard afterwards, however, that they generally resided in Europe—spending very little time in Mexico.'

'Miss Yarassa speaks English like a native,' said Edward.

'Poor child!' observed Frank. 'She must have been very much disappointed and embarrassed at not meeting her uncle in New Orleans.'

Edward thought, but an impulse of delicacy prevented his saying, that she was not half as much disappointed and embarrassed as he himself had been. He mentioned having written to General Walworth, and asked his father whether he supposed it would be necessary to write again.

'I think so,' was the reply. 'And meanwhile I hope Blanche can make her contented to remain here. I am very glad, my son, that accident enabled you to render this service to the daughter of your mother's friend.'

Blanche here entered the room, and heard the history of Edward's protectorship of Ximena, relating, in return, the sudden paroxysm of grief into which the poor girl had fallen at the sight of her mother's rosary. Without doubt Edward shared to some extent the sentiments of compassion so warmly expressed by his father, Blanche and Frank for the apparently friendless condition and sad bereavement of the young orphan; but he, nevertheless, could not help thinking what a fortunate thing it was for him that this paroxysm did not occur on board the vessel as they were crossing the gulf, or at the hotel, or on the boat coming up the river. Such a circumstance would have complicated his embarrassments greatly. He was rejoiced that the young lady was safely transferred from his hands to those of Blanche. He glanced at them—her hands—as this thought crossed his mind, and gave a quick start—only just restraining the exclamation that rose to his lips. Just then Blanche rose, and, saying she would return to Ximena, bade them all good night. Edward was so absorbed in his own reflections that he entirely forgot to acknowledge and return the salutation until after she had left the room.

He was thinking—thinking of—her hand. There was no wedding ring upon it! A magnificent diamond blazed upon her engagement finger, but wedding ring there was not! Could it be possible that they were not married yet? He had taken it for granted that they were, because Mrs. Clerville's death had not occurred until some time after the date set for

the marriage. Could anything have happened to prevent it before that? He hoped not! He did honestly and earnestly hope not! For since it was fated that she could not be his, he wished the barrier that would separate them forever to be erected at once. So long as he had considered her actually the wife of Frank, he had been resigned, had thought his love was extinct; but no sooner did he entertain a doubt on the subject, than the same love blazed up again furiously. It had been covered, it seemed, but not extinguished, by the ashes of despair. If those ashes had remained undisturbed, no doubt it would have died out in time; but stirred up, and pushed aside by this discovery, the fire had free vent again.

Frank and his father talked on; he answered like one in a dream; sometimes blundering upon the sense of what they said, and answering pertinently—but oftener giving response so wide of the mark, that they began to suspect his thoughts to be with his fair traveling companion—particularly as he every now and then looked around nervously at the door, and once asked Frank, quite abruptly, if it was not probable that Blanche would be down again that night. Frank said he supposed not, as she had bidden them good-night; adding that he hoped Miss Yarassa had become composed before this time. Edward blushed with vexation, as he perceived that he was considered to be in great anxiety about Miss Yarassa.

At length, to his great relief, Mr. Clerville, remarking that it was late, rose to retire. Edward willingly bade him good-night, but was not so ready to part with his brother. He proposed their taking a smoke together, before going to bed. Frank agreed, and lighting their cigars they puffed away for a few minutes in silence. Frank's Habana did not ignite as readily as was desirable. Or, rather, it would not draw freely.

After holding it to the flame of the lamp several times, he pronounced it a spurious thing, and pitched it out of the open window by which he sat. Selecting another with care, he cut the end artistically, and, with his feet up and his head back, in the attitude of your devotee to the weed, gave its fragrance to the night breeze that was playing among his hazel ringles. Edward had watched him, with the air of one who is glad of any excuse to postpone a thing which he is nevertheless anxious to do, and now cleared his throat twice before he felt his voice sufficiently steady to ask his brother a very simple question. Emitting a great mouthful of smoke, he enquired, with affected calmness,

‘You are not married yet, Frank?’

‘No.’ Edward’s heart gave a great bound. ‘Did I not mention in my letters—I thought I did—that Blanche was sick at the time first appointed; and my mother was then taken ill, and died on the day which was afterwards set for the marriage.’

Edward said he had not received this letter—and asked when the affair was to come off, now.

‘In the winter, probably. If Blanche will consent, that is.’

‘You do not suppose she will object?’

‘She does not like to be married so soon after her mother’s death; and I have not pressed the point, as yet.’

‘My father looks badly,’ said Edward. ‘Has he been ill?’

‘No. A good deal depressed in mind, of course. I am glad that you have come; and glad that you have brought this young lady with you. I hope that her presence may have a good effect on Blanche—in rousing her. Kate staid with her until last week. Blanche has been very dull since she left.

‘Can you not supply her place?’ Edward forced himself to say.

‘Not entirely,’ he answered, with a smile. ‘But I hope your fair Creole may.’

‘She will not be here long,’ said Edward, and then asked some questions about Mrs. Clerville’s illness and death. His brother answered at length, and it was long after midnight when they finally separated.

When he retired to his chamber, instead of going to bed as common sense ought to have dictated, Edward took from his pocket a key, the custody of which he never put out of his own hands, and went delving into the secret recesses of a middle-sized trunk that had been mounted on the top of a much larger one, when his luggage was placed hurriedly in his room on its arrival that night. After covering the floor around with the contents of the trunk, and leaving the unneat looking array for Thomas to attend to the next morning, he found what he was in search of—a square, flat, sealed packet. He carried it and laid it down on the table, glanced around the room, locked the door—though the hour of the night ought to have prevented all fear of intrusion—let down the curtains—though it was mid-summer, and warm enough for them to be up—and, returning to the table, took up the package. It was sealed with many seals, and enveloped in many foldings of paper. The superscription, had she seen it, would, undoubtedly, have excited Kate’s curiosity as to the contents—

“In the event of my death, this package is to be destroyed unopened.

“EDWARD CLERVILLE.”

He saved his executor the trouble of carrying out that direction, by now opening it himself. From the

voluminous foldings that surrounded it, he drew forth Blanche's daguerreotype.

The Blanche of two years before—not the Blanche of the present. No, she was changed; sadly changed, for there was the stamp of suffering now upon the pale face, which, in the picture before him, expressed only the unclouded joyousness of very early youth. He leant his head on his hand and gazed very earnestly upon it, and his heart heaved with an emotion of rebellious bitterness as he reflected that he had returned home only to be again tortured by the irresistible infatuation of which he had thought himself freed. What could he do? How struggle against it? Had he conceived the possibility of this misfortune, he would not have returned from Mexico. He would have written to his father, confessing his mad passion, and that he did not dare to risk a recurrence of it by seeing its unconscious object. But now, he was at home, he could not—no, it was impossible that he should go away again. He recollected, with painful vividness, the intolerable remorse which had assailed him in the few moments of agony while he was in doubt whether his father was not dead. How he had thought that if God would but grant him the opportunity, he would think of his father's happiness as he never had before, and endeavor to contribute to it by every means in his power. He knew that his presence was a great consolation—his absence an equal anxiety to Mr. Clerville. He must make the sacrifice of his own tranquility to his father's comfort. He could but endure as he had formerly; and he hoped the marriage would be delayed a few months only. But meanwhile his part must be a difficult one; for he would not entrench himself in his old citadel of reserve. Generosity, delicacy, decency itself, forbade it. He must see

Blancee often ; he must talk to her ; he must take a tone of quiet, fraternal familiarity towards her ! Yes, though his heart was convulsed in the effort, he would do it. Neither his brother or herself should ever know that their happiness was reared upon the ruins of his.

He closed the picture, and, with a heavy sigh, deposited it in a drawer of his secretary—a secret drawer. Always secrecy with this luckless love of his !

As he took the key from the lock, and fastened it upon his watch-chain, his face grew hot at the recollection that his father and Frank evidently considered him *epus* with his lovely charge, Ximena. He was too generous to wish to recall the service which he had rendered her ; but he did esteem it a most untoward ordering of fate which had placed him in so false a position, and he hoped most devoutly that Ximena's uncle would appear soon and relieve him of further perplexity in the matter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

XIMENA.

Very early the next morning, before it was quite light, Frank was awakened by a low tapping at his door. As he had no mysterious devoirs to pay to a stolen treasure, the door was not locked, and in answer to his invitation to enter, Blanche's maid appeared, leaving a lamp and a hurriedly written note. He raised himself on his elbow, took the lamp in one hand and the strip of paper in the other, and read as follows :

' Frank, I am really alarmed about this poor child !

It is now nearly morning, and she has been weeping unceasingly the live-long night! It is distressing to see her! She would not suffer herself to be undressed; and it was with great difficulty that her maid and myself succeeded in getting her from the floor to the bed, where she is now lying, her face buried in a pillow, and sobbing so that the whole bed shakes. I am only astonished that she is not perfectly exhausted by this time. She does not notice anything we say—and the woman seems frightened; says she never knew her to do so before. Her head is burning and her hands icy cold. I am afraid she will take brain fever if this state continues much longer; and I have felt greatly inclined to give her an opiate, (if she could be induced to swallow it, which I doubt!) only I feared to venture it myself. What do you think about it? I want you to send for Dr. Eldridge as soon as it is light. It is pouring rain, and I hated to send out a servant, and to rouse the doctor at such an hour, or I should have despatched a messenger several hours ago. Am afraid you cannot read this scribbling.'

Frank asked Jenny one or two questions, and bidding her put the lamp on the table and wait outside the door until he called her, he rose when she was gone, and wrote a few lines to Blanche, and a note to Dr. Eldridge. Opening the door a little space, he gave them to her as she stood in the passage, telling her to take the one to her mistress, and to send Robert instantly with the other to Dr. Eldridge. He then went back to bed, but not to sleep. This poor child, as he and Blanche called and considered her—there was something that moved his pity to positive pain in the picture Blanche had given of her silent but expressive sorrow. So young, and yet so utterly alone! He felt an emotion of indignation and contempt toward her relative, who had abandoned her thus to the

chance kindness of strangers. He was not surprised that Edward had obviously lost his heart to one so attractive both from her helplessness and her rare beauty; hoped she would return the regard of his brother; and thought, with satisfaction, of her escaping, by this means, all dependence upon a kinsman who seemed unworthy the confidence his sister had reposed in him.

The doctor lived but a few miles from Hollywood, and made his appearance some time before breakfast. Frank was up and ready to receive him; and Blanche was refreshing herself after her night's vigils with a bath and morning toilet, when a message came to her that he had arrived. She quickly finished dressing, and went to Ximena's room for a moment, to see how she was, before going down to the doctor. The sobs were fainter, and came only at intervals. Blanche could not see her face, but the relaxed attitude of her figure denoted great exhaustion. She told Juanita to throw a shawl over her mistress' feet, while she herself brought the physician.

He entered the room with the light tread of one accustomed to the sick chamber—examined the pulse of his patient—bent down and listened to her breathing—and desired, if possible, to see her face. But she paid no attention to the entreaties of Blanche, that she would lift her head from the pillow. The doctor returned down stairs and prepared an opiate and stimulant combined, which he requested might be given to her immediately—saying that he would stay and notice its effect.

Blanche received it from his hand with a doubtful look.

'I am very much afraid that I shall not be able to prevail on her to take it,' she remarked, as she turned to leave the room.

‘It is indispensable that she should,’ answered Dr. Eldridge.

‘I can try,’ said Blanche.

To her great satisfaction she found, on her return to the chamber, that Ximena had turned over, and was now lying on her side instead of her face. She carried the draught to her, but could not succeed in attracting her attention to it. The dark eyes would open a moment at her earnest adjuration, but the lids closed over them again almost instantly. She motioned Juanita to try—giving her the wine-glass containing the medicine. The woman spoke some time in Spanish, and though Blanche was not sufficiently familiar with the language to understand exactly what she was saying, she caught a word now and then which related to herself. Juanita was describing her anxiety, and informing Ximena of her having watched beside her all night. First some little movement of her lately passive form showed attention, and a moment afterwards the eyes were again unclosed: she looked up at Blanche with a glance of gratitude, at the same time extending her hand. Blanche leant over and kissed her, and offered the draught, which she swallowed without hesitation.

‘Try and sleep now,’ said Blanche softly, passing her hand caressingly over the hot brow and glossy hair. ‘If you were only undressed! It would be so much more comfortable. Will you try?’

Ximena made a movement of assent, and Juanita, with the assistance of Blanche and Jenny, quickly changed her closely-fitting traveling dress for a linen *robe de nuit*. She was perfectly passive in their hands, being evidently entirely prostrated in strength. She sank to sleep almost immediately.

Blanche’s apprehensions much relieved, she remembered that breakfast must be ready, and Dr. Eldridge

hungry after his early ride. Telling Jenny to watch by the young lady, and Juanita, who had been up all night, to go to bed, she proceeded herself down stairs.

As she passed down the corridor, and was approaching Edward's room, the door opened and he came out. When he saw her, he made one hasty, involuntary movement of retreat, but, checking it, walked forward to meet her with tolerable assurance. As both of them had resolved against resuming their former shyness, they shook hands, and went on to the breakfast room together, talking amicably by the way, though Edward's manner was rather hurried. Blanche was quiet and unembarrassed. There were three very good reasons for this: firstly, she had, when engaging herself to Frank, once for all resigned every thought of interest about his brother. It was a sentiment of interest only which she had ever entertained for him, and therefore it had not been a difficult matter to repress it. Added to this, she was now under the sobering influence of affliction. There is no other such dis-illusioner as grief. It is itself so real that the unreal vanishes from its presence. The little fanciful, girlish romance that had once invested Edward's idea in her mind now scarcely had a place in her memory. He had told Frank that his singular manner to her had arisen from diffidence, and to diffidence alone did she attribute his faltering tones, and the random remarks he uttered, as he walked by her side towards the breakfast room. Lastly, Frank, in an aside to her, while the doctor was preparing Ximena's medicine, had spoken of Edward's nervous anxiety the night before about the beautiful Creole. She thought it the most natural thing in the world that he should have fallen in love with her, fair as she was, and seemingly so forlorn. The marvel would

have been if he had proved insensible to such strong claims upon his admiration and manly pity. She wished to tell him as gently as possible, so as not to excite alarm, that she had thought it necessary to send for Dr. Eldridge to see Ximena, and was glad that no one was in the room when they entered excepting the servants.

'Is breakfast ready? Are you waiting for me?' she inquired of John.

'Yes m'm.'

'You can bring it in, then, at once.'

John and Augustus hastily departed to obey. Blanche placed herself at the table, and began to arrange, or disarrange, the cup in the tray before her, in order that Edward might not feel himself observed.

'Go and tell Jenny to send me a handkerchief, Ben,' she said to a little embryo dining-room servant, who generally stood beside her chair, and continued, speaking to Edward.

I was almost uneasy about Ximena this morning, and thought that Dr. Eldridge had better see her. He gave her an opiate, and she was asleep when I left her.

There was a dead silence. Edward did not know what to say, and Blanche benevolently continued her employment of putting spoons on the cups and saucers that were placed ready to receive the fragrant Mocha of Araby, or the cheering gunpowder of China. Some slight peculiarity in her tone and manner convinced him that she, too, was possessed of 'the fool idea' that he was in love with Miss Taras-sa. Yes, truth obliges the confession, so irritating was the thought, that those were the very words in which it took form in his mind. Before he could find words or voice to answer Blanche's remark in a man-

ner to disclaim the implied impeachment, breakfast was ready—the opportunity lost.

During the whole of breakfast, his face was a permanent crimson. Dr. Eldridge met him very cordially, and naturally supposing that he would be as much concerned about the young lady—whom he understood to be under his care—as the rest of the family were, began to assure him he hoped there was nothing serious to be apprehended in her case, but that, as he had no pressing call elsewhere, he should remain during the day to watch the symptoms. He thought it probable that fever might come on towards evening, but he trusted it could be easily managed. Much more he said, which Edward did not hear. The doctor, observing his embarrassment at the first mention of Miss Yarassé, instantly came to the same conclusion the others had; and though he was too well bred to allude, either directly or indirectly, to it, his smile and the tone of his remarks were not to be misunderstood. Edward sat indignant, but, alas! speechless. Under similar circumstances, Frank would have extricated himself from the suspicion without the least difficulty by simply informing them all of their mistake. But there is the misfortune of your diffident man. Speech and ideas always fail him just at his utmost need. Edward knew that if he attempted an explanation he would stammer and blush so that it would make bad worse. He was compelled to endure his wrongs in silence.

He left the breakfast table as soon as he possibly could, strode indignantly into the library, and began hastily to indite a letter. A very brief and not over courteous communication to General Walworth it was. He felt downright savage at being judged and convicted of a passion of which he was perfectly guiltless, and was determined that it should not be

his fault if he was not delivered from the imputation by the speedy departure of the object of his supposed admiration. He was joined by Frank as he was putting up the document.

'Is that a death warrant you are folding?' said Frank, with a smile. 'You look as stern and resolute as if it was.'

'No, it is merely a business letter,' he replied, placing it in an envelope. Taking a pen, he hastily dashed off the direction.

'General Walworth,' said Frank, leaning over his shoulder to read it; 'your fair Creole's uncle, I suppose? But would it not be better, Edward, for my father to write to him? Let me see what you have said, will you?'

He took the letter from Edward's hand, opened it, glanced over the very few lines it contained, and looked at his brother in surprise.

'Why, my dear fellow, this will never do! So cold—it is scarcely civil! The man deserves no better, I grant you, if it is by his voluntary fault that he has been so neglectful, but think of the young lady herself! It will never do. Pray let my father write. As he was acquainted with her mother, he may probably have known this man himself. At all events, it would certainly be more proper, under the circumstances, that the letter be from him.'

'Do you think so?'

'Undoubtedly. I am not surprised you should be indignant, but—'

He paused, as Edward looked up with an exclamation of impatience. 'I wish to heaven, Frank,' he exclaimed hastily, 'that you would not commit the preposterous mistake of supposing me to be in love, as it is called, with this girl, merely because she happened to be entrusted to my protection, and that ac-

cident compelled me to bring her here. It was not my fault, I assure you. I am no more in love with her than with this chair.'

He gave the chair in question a rude touch with his foot. Frank first stared and then laughed.

'I thought you were, I confess, and did not wonder at it, for she is handsome enough to justify such a weakness. But what is there in the imputation to make you look so wrathful?'

'Miss Blanche say please come there, Mass Frank,' said Ben, entering at the moment.

'I really would let my father write that letter, Edward,' Frank remarked, as he turned to go. And Edward, casting his eye over it again, acknowledged that it was decidedly too curt and cold for such an occasion. Crumpling it in his hand with an impatient sigh, he threw it on the hearth and walked out of the room.

Blanche was standing in the hall talking to Frank. How altered she was, Edward thought, pausing unconsciously, to observe in detail what he had but a general impression of as yet. Though her form had not lost the lovely roundness of youth, it was more slender far than formerly, and her face much thinner. No golden curls now floated from her shoulders. The hair was drawn back, half covering the ears, into a plain knot at the back of the head. True it waved and rippled as it went, and there was such a rich abundance of it, that Edward could scarcely regret the ringlets, beautiful as they had been. This arrangement he thought more classic. And on a critical survey of the face itself, he was not sure but that the chiselling finger of suffering had heightened its beauty also. The features now were of clearer, finer symmetry. The complexion was of such marble whiteness, that it looked like a face in parian—only softer,

more transparent. Perhaps the sombre dress made all the more striking the girlish youthfulness of aspect — for she still looked very young. But in form, attitude and movement, a womanly dignity had taken the place of the almost child-like gracefulness which Edward had admired. The dancing step was sorrow-weighted. Edward's studies had never lain much in the poetic department, but as his eye followed her, when she turned from Frank, and mounted the stair slowly, almost languidly a line of L. E. L.'s occurred to him —

"For nothing like the heavy step betrays the heavy heart!"

Towards evening, as the doctor anticipated, Ximena had high fever and delirium. He looked a little grave, as he followed Blanche down stairs, after counting his patient's pulse.

'I would bleed her,' he said, 'but she is already so much reduced in strength—from inanition. I judge, by what you tell me, and her woman says—that I cannot hazard it.' He took up his medicine case from off a table in the sitting-room, opened it and selected a phial. 'We must try *veratrum*. I think it will bring her pulse down during the course of the night. And as soon as it is down sufficiently, Miss Blanche—say to eighty, or even ninety—it is a hundred and forty now!—by all means get her to take some nourishment. Anything she prefers. Coffee or tea would be best; but anything will do. Of course, I need not warn you to be careful with the medicine. You know that an over-dose would be dangerous.'

'Oh! yes,' said Blanche, smiling. 'You may trust me, I think. I am very much afraid of *veratrum*.'

'Good evening, then. I will call early in the morning.'

'Good evening; but do not be surprised, doctor, if

I send for you during the night. If the fever does not begin to subside by midnight, I shall be alarmed.'

'There is no occasion to be alarmed, I hope and believe,' answered he; but send certainly, if you think it necessary.'

He bowed and retired; while Blanche sat down and wrote off the directions he had given her, in order to be sure that she did not forget them. She then went back up stairs, and remained there until summoned to tea.

'You are not going to sit up again to-night, Blanche?' said Frank, as she rose from table.

'Yes. You know I have the *veratrum* to give. I should be afraid to trust the dropping of that even to Mom Hannah, careful as she is. She has not a steady hand. And any how, I could not think of leaving Ximena while she is so ill.'

She started as she uttered the last word, and looked apprehensively at Edward, as if she was sorry she had said it. Frank was standing beside her, and laid his hand on her shining tresses, with more of a brotherly than a lover-like solicitude of manner.

'You will be made ill yourself, I fear, by such unaccustomed fatigue,' he said.

'Oh! no; there is not the least danger. I slept nearly all the afternoon, and am quite fresh now. Good-night, papa. I scarcely think I shall be down again; good-night, Edward.'

She placed her hand on Frank's arm, and moved towards the door, as Mr. Clerville and Edward responded to her good-night. The former begged her not to incur any unnecessary fatigue or exposure—wished he could assist her in watching, as he, too, was apprehensive her health might suffer from her being up so much at night.'

'Not the slightest danger of it,' she repeated, paus-

ing a moment as she reached the door, and looking back with a smile.

Edward's eye had been following her retiring form; but he withdrew it now with a double pang. Her easy familiarity with Frank, as she drew him out of the room, despite all his efforts to resist the emotion, filled his heart with jealous pain; and, when she turned and smiled, the subdued expression of her countenance was so different to its former unshadowed joyousness, that there was a sudden throb in his throat and moisture in his eye.

Blanche stopped as soon as she and Frank were in the hall.

'Did you ask Dr. Eldridge? Do you think he considered her dangerously ill?' she inquired eagerly, but in a low tone.

'Why no,' answered Frank. 'He does not consider her dangerously ill. He told me distinctly that there is no cause for alarm. You are nervous, I expect, from the fatigue and worry of last night, and are frightening yourself needlessly. Give the medicine to me. I will sit up and measure out the dose at the proper time, and any one can then administer it. You said Hannah is to be up, did you not? She can come for it, or, rather, I will bring it to the door to her. You must go to bed, Blanche. You certainly ought to be satisfied that between us it will be properly attended to. So go to bed, like a good child!'

'Oh! impossible, Frank. I could not feel it right to leave a guest in this way—'

'When I am attending to her?'

'But you cannot be in the room! No, no; I assure you that if I went to bed I should not be able to close my eyes; whereas, sitting by her, in a large chair, I can sleep—'

'No doubt of it,' interrupted he; 'you will sleep a

great deal, starting every minute to look at the watch, as you will be sure to do. No, Blanche; I insist on your giving me the phial and directions. If you will stay in the room, at least you shall be kept awake by thinking of the medicine all the time. I will bring it to you at the designated hours.'

'A willful man must have his way,' said Blanche; 'so I suppose I shall have to let you share my watch; wait a moment, and I will get the medicine.'

She hurried up stairs, Frank following. He waited a considerable time before she appeared.

'Here it is, with the directions. I wrote them off to prevent the possibility of mistake.' She took the first dose at six o'clock; it is now nine, and I have just given her another. It is to be taken every three hours, you see; so at twelve you must bring it.'

'Very well. Now go to sleep,' he said, kissing her brow.

'I wish I could return the recommendation,' she answered with a smile; 'but on the contrary, I must say, do keep awake.'

It wanted ten minutes to twelve o'clock as Frank glanced at the watch that lay on the table before him. He laid down the book he had been reading, put his cigar out of his mouth, and dropping Ximena's medicine into the tiny wine-glass Blanche had given him, sat watching the minute hand as it slowly moved onward. When it pointed to eleven, he rose took up the lamp and the draught, and went to the door. As he opened it, he was surprised to see Blanche coming to meet him.

'What is the matter? Miss Yarassa is not worse, I hope?—or did you think I had forgotten the hour! It is not twelve yet.'

'Oh! I knew you would not forget it, but I am not sure whether she ought to take any more of the

medicine. I know so little about the pulse—but her's, though it is still quick, seems to me very feeble. I have just been down stairs, intending to get papa, if he was still up, to come and see her ; but he has gone to bed.'

'Certainly ; an hour ago.'

'Well, I cannot think of giving him the trouble of getting up and dressing. You know when he is awakened in this way, he does not go to sleep again that night, and always feels badly for it the next day, so you must come in for a moment, in character of physician, and count her pulse. You will be able to judge whether she needs the remaining doses which the doctor ordered.'

* They were by this time at the threshold of Ximena's chamber, and Blanche led the way in. She had dismissed Juanita and Hannah to the adjoining apartments, and had shut the doors that excluded them, as their loud and continued welcoming of 'tired Nature's sweet restorer,' was not a sound well adapted to a sick room.

It was a large chamber, and so dimly lighted that objects were barely perceptible. In one corner, but standing considerably out from the walls, was the bed, but draped in the gauze-like folds of the mosquito netting, that fell all around it. A deep, softly-cushioned chair, in which Blanche had been sleeping, sat near by ; and a little in front of this, at one side, stood a small table of oval form, one corner of the blue and white damasked cover of which rested on the arm of the chair. A vase of flowers, a China *flacon* of perfume, one or two glass and spoons, and a silver ice-pitcher, were crowded together at one end of the table ; while on the side, next the chair, stood a lamp, covered by an opaque green shade, a good deal the shape of a bell, which effectually shut in the light,

illuminating only a small circle upon the table, immediately around its own base. A little French watch was placed where the light fell broadest; and a book, with a jet-mounted fan resting on its open page, lay half within the circle, and half in the surrounding obscurity.

Blanche removed the shade, lifted the lamp, and approached the bed. Gathering the transparent folds of the net into one hand, and holding it up in a graceful festoon, she threw the light full over the figure reposing on the snowy couch beneath, and motioned Frank to her side.

Seldom does sculptor mould, or painter portray, more consummate beauty of form and tints, than were combined in the living model before them. She was resting on the left side, with her head thrown slightly back on the pillow, so that almost her full face, and the throat, were visible. The left hand, from the closed fingers of which fell several loops of the blue and gold rosary, supported the cheek. The black hair escaping from the little lace cap into which Blanche had gathered it, was spread over the pillow in luxuriant profusion; and the brows and lashes, equally black, were marvels of delicate pencilling. The cheek was blooming with the fever flush, and the crimson lips just parted sufficiently to give a glimpse of teeth white as the pulp of the cocoa-nut. The sheet had been pushed to the waist, by a movement of the right hand, which was thrown forward carelessly, looking like an exquisite carving of ivory—so motionless and clearly chiselled was it—and the lovely bust, thus revealed, swelled softly the white drapery that covered it.

Every Southern planter is, of necessity, a very tolerable physician in an ordinary way, his patriarchal life giving much exercise to his skill in the healing art.

as well as teaching a practical knowledge of the power of governing. Frank had for years been accustomed to count pulses and diagnose symptoms ; but his patients had always been of a very different order from the rare beauty and delicate organization of his present subject. He put his finger to the wrist—scarcely touching it, lest it should awaken the sleeper—and taking the watch from the table, counted the quick, but faint beatings—gazed thoughtfully on the face, bent his head close, to listen to the breathing and then turned away. Blanche, after replacing the lamp on the table, and adjusting the shade over it, followed him from the room.

‘I would give her a cup of coffee now, and omit the medicine this time,’ he said, as they passed into the corridor.

‘Oh! Frank,’ exclaimed Blanche, clasping her hands, ‘has she taken too much *veratrum*?’

‘On the contrary, not enough yet, I believe. She must have the other dose at three o’clock, as her pulse is still more than a hundred. But, as you observed, it is very weak; and her strength must not be let down too much. I think you told me she has taken no food to-day?’

‘Not a morsel, or a drop of anything. I tried in vain and repeatedly, to get her to swallow a sip or two of tea. She would not do it. And Juanita says it has been just this way ever since her mother died—that she has lived on air.’

‘The doctor tells me that he does not apprehend brain fever, but fears that it may take a low typhoid form; and for this reason he is anxious to check it as soon as possible. Wishes to push the *veratrum* to-night, and thus sustain her strength by nourishing food and stimulants.’

‘For Heaven’s sake, do not attempt to push it too far,’ said Blanche.

'Of course not. There is no indication, at present, of her being much affected by it. It is not to neutralize the narcotic influence, but because it is a stimulating nourishment, that I say give her coffee--or tea. But how will you get her to drink it, if she refuses everything?'

'Since you say she needs it so much, I shall just insist until she does drink it. I will have some brought immediately. Wait, please! I will be back in a moment.'

She hastened into her own room, roused Hannah, who was sleeping beside Jenny on a mattress that had been temporarily placed for them, and sent her for the coffee, and returned to Frank, who was pacing noiselessly up and down the corridor.

'Is she not the most beautiful creature you ever saw?' said Blanche with enthusiasm. 'I do hope Edward will marry her, if only that I may have the pleasure of seeing her all the time.'

'He has no idea of it at present.'

'How do you know?'

'He told me so himself.'

'Told you he had no idea of marrying her?'

'Not in those words; but he was very much disgusted at our having all, as he said, taken up the preposterous notion that he was in love with her. Protested that he was no more in love with her than with one of the old green morocco chairs in the library.'

Blanche looked up, half surprised, half amused.

'He must have very little to do, then,' she said. 'I wonder what he would say if he knew of the report with which Thomas edited the other servants on his arrival?'

'What was that?'

Blanche smiled, and proceeded to relate what Jenny

had repeated to her the night before, that Thomas had said, about there being a secret marriage; adding that Thomas afterwards excused himself to the maid for having told this story, by explaining that the young lady was taken for his master's wife all the way they came up the river, and at Scarborough, and how vexed his master had been at the mistake.

'Hah! that is the reason he is so sensitive on the subject,' said Frank, laughing heartily, but in a properly subdued tone. 'It certainly was a singular chance which placed him in a position for which he is about as little fitted as a man well could be—protector of a young lady! I confess I never was so much astonished in my life as when they came in last night. Like the people on the boat, and in Scarborough, I thought of course she was his wife; but the wonder was, that he should ever have thought of taking a wife; and when he said, or implied, that she was not, my amazement redoubled as to how in the name of probability she became so familiarly associated with him. Really, he deserves a medal for moral courage, to have undertaken, and acquitted himself so successfully of, such a responsibility! I can just imagine the agonies he has been enduring, poor fellow, with such a charge on his hands!' He laughed again. 'You should have seen a letter which he wrote this morning to Miss Yarassa's uncle! It was a model of the curt imperative; translated into plain words, it would have read: 'Sir—I am astonished at your conduct in having failed to meet your relatives in New Orleans, as you were expected to do. It has put me to the disagreeable necessity of bringing your niece home with me, where she is very much in my way; and I must request you to come and relieve me of the inconvenience as soon as you receive this letter.'

‘But he did not send such a letter, surely?’ said Blanche, quite shocked.

‘No. At my suggestion, he concluded to leave the writing of it to my father.’

‘I do not see why he is in such a hurry to get rid of her! I am sure I wish the uncle would never come to claim her, and that she could stay with us. I have taken a great fancy to her, Frank!’

‘Of course,’ said he, smiling and shrugging his shoulders.

‘Why of course?’

‘Young ladies generally take these fancies to each other at first sight, but—’

‘They don’t last long, you mean? Oh! but I consider myself an exception to the general rule. I am not at all addicted to the forming of hasty friendships—and I am sure my fancy for Ximena will continue.’

‘Perhaps so; but you must confess that it will be a matter of accident if it does. You have been acquainted with her how long?—a little more than twenty-four hours; and know nothing whatever about her, excepting that she is very handsome.’

‘I judge her character by her face—and it is the sweetest face! She is like a beautiful picture. I am never weary of admiring her. And you will please to remember, Mr. Frank,” she added, with a touch of her former graceful archness, ‘that my sex have an intuitive knowledge of character, which Nature has denied to you self-satisfied lords of creation! You are all so afraid of being caught in a blunder, and having to acknowledge it afterwards, that you must weigh, and examine, and beat about the bush ever so long before you will venture to form a judgment—while we trust entirely to our instincts, and are very seldom deceived, you must confess.’

Frank laughed; but before he could answer, Blanche exclaimed—

‘I do wonder if Mom Hannah is not coming to-night with the coffee! It seems to me there has been ample time to have made it. Ah! there she is now. I will send you some, Frank, and you must drink it; and at three o’clock you are to come.’

‘Yes. Put a good deal of cream and sugar into the cup you give Miss Yarassa.’

‘Very well. I hope I can get her to take it.’

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE VALLEY OF THE DARK SHADOW.

About two hours afterwards, as Frank sat quietly reading, his door was suddenly burst open, and Blanche rushed in, pale, trembling, inarticulate with terror! As he sprang towards her she regained her voice, and exclaimed, in husky, scarce audible tones: ‘She has taken too much! I cannot waken her!’

The next instant they were both in Ximena’s chamber. The shade was off the lamp, but the net was down still around the bed. Frank hurriedly threw it up over the top of the bedstead to get it out of the way—and stooping, examined Ximena’s pulse and her face. There was an alarming change in both since he saw her before. The pulse was barely perceptible, the face colorless, and the breathing peculiar. Though a chill of horror struck to his heart, he endeavored to reassure Blanche, who stood, her very lips white, and shaking as if she had an ague fit.

‘She is a little narcotized,’ he said, ‘and must be roused. Where is Hannah?’

'Send for the doctor! oh, fly for the doctor, Frank!' cried Blanche in a panting voice.

'Yes, but first let me do what I can.'

He lifted the lid of the pitcher, plunged his hand into the water, gathered up several floating fragments of ice, drew a white linen handkerchief from his pocket, and dipped it into the pitcher likewise—straightened it, put the ice in it, folded it loosely, and, raising Ximena's head, laid it under the back of her neck. It was the work of less than a moment. 'My dear Blanche,' he continued, as he picked up her handkerchief, and, saturating it also with ice-water, laid it over Ximena's eyes, 'do not alarm yourself so dreadfully. She is slightly narcotized, that is all. Sit down.' He placed her in the chair by the bed-side. 'Don't give way to such terror, or you will not be able to render any assistance. Can you not fan her? And tell me where Hannah is.'

His words had the effect he intended—of rousing Blanche herself.

'I will call her,' she said, and sprang across the room to the door which communicated with her own chamber. Her hand trembled so that she could not turn the lock. Frank opened it, and had Hannah awake in a moment. She looked up astonished and frightened, for his face, too, was very pale, though his manner was not flurried.

'Quick, Hannah, get up,' he said, 'and go and make some mustard cataplasms. Wake John and Augustus first, and tell John to make some very strong coffee, and Augustus to heat some water for a foot-bath. Instantly tell them. Make haste back with the mustard! You need not be particular in mixing it.'

Hannah was effective at once, and hurried out of the room, while Frank turned to Blanche.

‘Waken Jenny, Blanche, and send for more ice. Put it on the back of her neck, and over her forehead and eyes. Get a stiff hair brush, and brush her head violently, so as to irritate it as much as possible—shake her, pinch her—in a word, try every way to get her awake! I will return immediately.’

‘The doctor, Frank! the doctor!’

‘I am going now to send. I hope and believe there is no great danger, but prompt measures are necessary.’

He spoke quickly, but without excitement, and left her as he concluded. He ran down stairs—taking three steps at a bound—dispatched a messenger, at life-and-death speed for the doctor, and hastened to the kitchen. Augustus was blowing up the fire, John grinding coffee, and Hannah standing at a table mixing the mustard. A piece of white cloth lay on the table by her. They all looked frightened and excited.

‘Make haste, boys,’ said Frank, as he entered. ‘Is the mustard ready, Hannah?’

- Without hearing her reply, he took up the piece of cloth, and tore off some wide strips, the size and shape he wanted the cataplasms, seized a knife and began spreading them from the mass that Hannah was working at.

‘Have that coffee as strong as you can make it, John! Put four times as much as usual to the same quantity of water. Keep a good fire, Augustus, and plenty of hot water.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘There—that will do, Hannah! It is mixed sufficiently. Go on spreading the plasters, and bring them up immediately. And now, John, bring up the coffee as soon as it is ready.’

He hurried into the house, and up stairs, with the four cataplasms he had prepared, passing Jenny on

the staircase, who had a large bowl of ice in her hands.

Blanche was following his directions when he entered, shaking Ximena; brushing her hair the wrong way; murmuring broken prayers with quivering lips. Frank approached quickly, and gave her two of the cataplasms, saying, 'Bind those around her ankles, Blanche.' He placed the remaining two on the wrists, and hearing Jenny come in, called to her without looking around, 'Bring me some pocket handkerchiefs, Jenny.'

The girl set the bowl of ice down in the middle of the door, and ran into her mistress' room to a drawer, returning in a moment with what he required. As he was tying up the wrists, Hannah brought in the remaining plasters.

'Put some to the soles of her feet,' said he; 'and here, give me two for the palms of her hands! Bring me some French brandy, Hannah! and, Jenny, go and hurry John with the coffee.'

'Here it is, sir,' answered John, from the door. He advanced with a small tray, and set one side of it on the edge of the table, as he moved the things away to make room for it. 'Take this away, Jenny,' he said in a low tone, holding towards her the vase of flowers. She was standing close by, but so absorbed in staring with terror and involuntarily wringing her hands, that she did not hear him. He gave her a sharp push on the shoulder: 'Here—don't you hear?'

She looked around.

'What are you standing there for as if you did not have any sense?' he whispered. 'Move these things off the table.' Jenny obeyed, and pushing the tray on it, he filled a large China cup with the coffee, and then went and brought another lamp. Looking round to see if there was anything else that he could

do, he observed that the netting still hung down around the foot and back side of the bed. He drew up a chair, and standing on it, caught the net and pulled it up entirely out of the way.

'Yes, that is well,' said Frank. 'Have you got the brandy, Hannah? Put the decanter on the table, I will take it in a moment.'

'Is the water to be brought up, Mass Frank?' enquired John.

'No; not just now.'

He had finished binding on the mustard, and now stood gazing intently upon the pale face. Putting his finger on the temple artery, he started as he became conscious that its beatings were more slow and faint than when he had noticed it on entering the room first. His lips closed firmly for an instant, then he lifted his head.

'John!' He spoke in a quick and decided tone.

'Yes, sir,' responded John, from the side of the room near the door, whither he had retired.

'Go and send Augustus to meet and hurry the doctor. Tell him to ride without drawing rein! You, yourself, bring a bucket of very hot water. Let it be only not boiling.'

John's 'yes sir,' was lost in the movement of his feet, as he ran out of the room, nearly oversetting, as he went, two women servants. They had been roused from their slumbers a few minutes before by Augustus, who thought they might be of use, and were hurrying into the apartment with faces of mingled curiosity and horror.

'Hannah, get me instantly the large bottle of ammonia—hartshorn—out of the medicine chest!'

While she went for it, Blanche watched Frank's countenance in silent dread, afraid to ask a question, and he hastily snatched up the hair-brush, which still

lay on the pillow where she had left it, and began manipulating Ximena's head in the most extraordinary and vigorous manner. He brushed it as forcibly as possible—back, forward, in a circle!—he dented the brush into it with a quivering motion of his hand—he threw aside the ice from her brow and the back of her head, and applied the brushing-process to the nape of the neck, and all around the throat—continuing it until Hannah touched his arm, and extended towards him a huge glass-stopped bottle of concentrated spirits of amonia.

Hold it a moment,' he said, looking round: 'Blanche, this mustard is very strong, it must not be left on too long, or it will blister the surface; you had better remove it from the feet and ancles now. Ah, here is the water! Set it down on a chair by the bed, John! Some towels, Hannah! Jenny, quick, get them! Have them dipped into the water, Blanche, and wrapped around the feet.'

He turned to the table, and as he did so, observed the women who had just come in. 'Here, Rachel, take these towels!' he said to one of them.—'Hannah, you can be taking the cataplasms off the hands!'

Lifting the cup of coffee, he poured out a third of its contents, filled it up with brandy, and touched it with his lips. The coffee was still hot, and the addition of so much brandy made it a burning draught. He set it down, took the bottle of hartshorn, and stepped back to the bed.

Blanche had a steaming towel in her hand, and exclaimed, as he glanced towards her, 'Oh, Frank, this water is almost boiling! It will scald her!—particularly to put it on just after the mustard!'

'Wait a moment until it cools a little then—but put it on very hot. Her pulse is failing! She must be

roused! Wrap her hands up in a hot towel, too, Hannah!

He opened the bottle in his hand, and drenched head, throat and neck in the powerfully strong spirits. At the same time, both the hands and the feet were enveloped in the almost burning cloths. Ximena gave a sudden shiver of consciousness—the first motion she had made since they had been trying to waken her. Frank seized a teaspoon from the table, and inserting the handle between the clenched teeth, prized them open. With another spoon he poured the fluid, at first drop by drop, then by the spoonful, between her lips. There was a gurgling, strangling sort of sound, and the large dark eyes suddenly opened with a startled stare, but closed again immediately. She made an effort to swallow—and Blanche, who had sprung to her side dreadfully alarmed lest she should be strangled, lifted her head, exclaiming, ‘drink! drink, Ximena!’ as Frank pressed the cup to her lips. Something like surprise, and an expression of pain, flitted over the countenance, lost almost instantly in the returning look of sleepy unconsciousness. Giving the cup to Blanche, Frank again plied, with remorseless hand, the irritating brush and harts-horn. This time the effect was more decided. Her face became contracted with pain, and she tried to lift one of her imprisoned hands, moving them and her feet restlessly.

‘Now, Blanche,’ said Frank, in a quiet, almost cheerful tone, ‘she must drink the coffee, and I think she will be safe. I will keep her awake with the brush, while you make her swallow it.’

Slowly, with great difficulty was this accomplished. Half of it was spilled in the process; but Frank poured out another cup, and by dint of what Rachel afterwards described to wondering auditors as ‘a

scaldin' of her hands and feet, and a scrubbin' of her head with that stuff Mass Frank put on it,' she drank the whole.

'Will you give her more?' enquired Blanche.

'Here is the doctor,' answered he, as a hasty step sounded without, and the next moment Dr. Eldridge entered.

'It is well that you have been so prompt, Mr. Clerville,' was all he said, after Frank had told him, in the fewest possible words, what had been done. He asked no questions as to how the thing occurred—did not seem inclined to talk—but applied himself vigorously to following up the advantage already gained.

It was hours before his face relaxed from its grave and vigilant expression, or the unresisting, and but half-conscious form of Ximena had a moment's rest from the torturing expedients employed to keep her awake. Baring her arms to the shoulders, the doctor called for a bunch of nettles, the stinging strokes of which soon covered the smooth ivory skin with a fiery eruption. This rough treatment was alternated by violent shaking, and sudden dashes of ice water into her face. The servants, and even Blanche, were half inclined to look on him as a barbarian—so pitilessly cruel did his conduct appear to them; more especially when Ximena, who was now recovering some consciousness of sensation, would shrink from the touch of the nettles, and give a gasping shiver as the water deluged her face and bosom. Her recovery was probably accelerated by the sudden and piercing screams of Juanita, who all at once appeared at the bed-side in a state of frantic terror—uttering loud shrieks and cries. She had but just awakened, though it was now at least two hours after sunrise, having slept so heavily as not to have been disturbed by the

passing about and noise during the night. In fact, very little noise had been made, and even that little had not reached her ear, both doors of the dressing closet which she occupied being shut. Rising hastily, with the sense of having overslept herself, she had hurried to her young mistress' chamber. No one observed her entrance, and the scene which presented itself to her startled sight, was sufficiently alarming to justify her terror—though not, perhaps, to excuse such a noisy expression of it.

This was Frank's opinion, at least. He had withdrawn from the chamber on the arrival of the Doctor, and had been walking up and down the passage before the door ever since—excepting when he went to procure, or to order, something which the Doctor called for. But he hastened into the room now, and was about to take the vociferous and struggling Juanita away by force, when the Doctor put his hand on his arm, and begged him to let her remain.

'Her shrill screaming is a very good assistance to the other remedies,' he said, finding it necessary to scream, almost, himself, in order to make his voice audible through hers.

Frank relinquished the grasp he had taken of both her arms, and casting one glance towards the bed, to which the Doctor had already returned, he again left the apartment. But Blanche was struck with compassion at the woman's distress, and going to her, succeeded, after several ineffectual attempts, in making her understand, and believe, that Ximena was not dead, or dying, but that she was very ill. She entreated Juanita not to render herself helpless by giving way to such grief and terror, but to control her feelings, and lend her assistance in attending on her mistress.

This was touching the right chord with the faithful

creature. Her sobs were hushed, even her sobs choked back. She came and stood quite quietly by the bed; only brushing away her fast falling tears, as she saw the quiverings of pain with which Ximena shrank from the Doctor's hand. She had opened her eyes wide at the first cries uttered by Juanita, and was only half asleep now, swallowing the coffee the doctor gave her, without much difficulty. More than once she lifted her hand to her head, but in a bewildered, aimless manner. She would open her eyes with a start, on being touched, but seemed unable to resist more than momentarily the drowsiness that still oppressed her.

'Well, Miss Blanche, said the Doctor, at last, looking up with a smile, 'if you will just keep her awake or rather keep waking her, by throwing this water in her face, for a few hours longer, she will do very well, I think. You had better let one of these women do it, and take some rest yourself, or I shall have you on my hands as a patient next.'

'She is really out of danger then, Doctor? Blanche demanded, eagerly.

'I hope and believe so.'

'Thank Heaven,' she cried, fervently. 'I must go and tell Frank.'

But she stopped a moment to repeat to Juanita what the Doctor had said, the latter having been so buried in her own thoughts as not to have heard him.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LUXURY OF A LETTER AFTER LONG WAITING.

'No letters again!' exclaimed Kate Lorimer to her husband, as her messenger to the post-office returned

empty-handed, save of some uninteresting newspapers? What can be the meaning of it? I declare, Henry, I am becoming really uneasy, it is so unusual. Somebody must be sick, or Blanche would not neglect writing for such a time.'

'Is it so long since you heard? I thought you received a letter not more than a week ago?'

'But that was just a short note. She said she would write again in a few days, a long letter.'

'You know, love, that poor Blanche is not in spirits to write long letters now. You can scarcely expect such epistles as you used to get from her last winter.'

'But none at all! It is strange. Something is the matter, you may depend upon it.'

Dr. Lorimer laughed as he rose from the breakfast table, and walked around to where she sat to give her his good-bye kiss before going out for the morning. 'You are making yourself uncomfortable about nothing, love,' he said. 'Think how often you neglect writing at any stipulated time, and you will not be surprised that Blanche should do the same. If anything was the matter, your father or Frank would certainly either write or telegraph.'

'And it really does not seem strange to you?'

'Not the least so. Good-bye till dinner time.'

He stooped and kissed her.

'Stop—your cravat is horridly tied! Let me arrange it for you. Oh, I can't reach away up there!' she exclaimed, as he bent his throat towards her. 'Kneel down, can't you? Come, remember, sir, that you are a Catholic now, and the very first thing a Catholic has to learn is to kneel down and say his prayers.'

'But you don't want me to perform that ceremony now, do you? Twice a day is surely often enough, at first, for a man not accustomed to it!'

Kate gave him a smart tap on the cheek, as he placed himself in the attitude required. 'You ought to be ashamed to acknowledge that you are not accustomed to it. And a little intermediate practice will not hurt such a stiff-kneed personage.' She pulled the obnoxious bow loose, and went on talking as she tied, untied and re-tied it. 'I am afraid, indeed I know, very well, that humility is not your failing. I question whether you ever knelt and said your prayers—at least since you were a child—until you came under my administration. Did you?'

'I cannot affirm positively, but this I know, that I have enough of it to do now to make up for past deficiencies. That you must admit.'

'I admit no such thing. And, by the way, pray tell me what is the reason you did not kneel to me in making your proposal, as is incumbent upon all lovers on such occasions? The omission was exceedingly disrespectful, and, if I had only thought of it at the time, would have been a good excuse for rejecting such a free and easy gentleman.'

'It is fortunate for me that you did not think of it then. But the omission was unavoidable, for if you remember, I propounded the inquiry to which you allude, on horse-back. As a Spanish saddle might have proved rather a ticklish kneeling cushion, and I had not thought of providing myself with one of the flat ones that are used in circuses, which would have been more convenient for the purpose, why I hope the failure may be forgiven?'

Kate laughed, and having achieved a tie to the cravat that satisfied her, kissed him between the eyes and told him that he might go, at the same time holding him fast by the shoulder, she took out one of the side combs with which her curls were locked back behind her ears, and began to comb his hair back from his brow.

‘Certainly, your forehead and nose are very like dear Frank’s,’ she said, ‘though the general resemblance does not strike me half as much as it did at first.’

‘I suppose, humph!’ he paused, and rose hastily, as a clock in an adjoining room commenced striking. ‘Nine o’clock; is it possible!’ he said looking at his watch. ‘Having a wife is a dreadful waste of time to a man of my profession, I find. Indeed, several of my elderly patients, who consider themselves privileged to say what they think, have hinted as much to me, more than once. Yesterday morning, when I went in rather late to see Mr. Yerby, he thanked Heaven, with a profound sigh, that he was not married, if the being so would have the same effect on him that it does on some of his neighbors—that of making them neglect all their business.’

‘Oh, he is nothing but a cross old bachelor!’ said Kate, ‘and I’ll be bound if he had a dozen wives, not one of them would care enough for him to want to keep him with her two minutes longer than it was possible to get rid of him.’

‘I must be gone, really,’ said Lorimer, kissing her again.

‘And you have not touched the papers! Will you not just glance over them?’

‘You must do it for me, love, and tell me the news when I come home. I expect there is nothing in them.’ He picked up his hat and hurried away.

The next morning Kate’s anxieties were removed by the sight of a letter from Blanche. There were two postage stamps on it, and its weight showed that they were both needed. She tore it open quickly, and was delighted to see the many closely written pages which it contained.

‘Tell Alonzo he can come and clear off the table,’

Jim ;' she said to her little messenger who had brought the welcome letter to her, and a bundle of papers to her lord and master. She had adopted, in her *menage*, the English fashion, of having all the breakfast placed on table at once, so as to dispense with the attendance of servants at that meal. Perhaps this was one reason of Dr. Lorimer's lingering so every morning, instead of going to his *exigeante* patients, as they expected. Leaving the table, they went into the charming little room where Kate spent most of her time. The winter before, it had been the cosiest place imaginable, with its rich, deep blue curtains and carpet, its softest of couches and chairs, and the bright fire that was always kept burning, whenever the temperature of the weather gave the least excuse for it. Nor did it look less invitingly pleasant now, in its cool summer arrangement of lace curtains, cane-backed and seated chairs, and matted floor. Sunshine and breeze came through the open windows, and under one of them Kate seated herself, on the couch which, swathed in its linen covering, still held place there. Her husband threw himself in a lounging attitude by her side, and opening one of the papers in his hand, prepared to divide his attention between it and the items from Kate's letter, which he knew from experience she would read out to him. But before Kate had found the commencement of Blanche's voluminous communication, he was summoned hastily to see a child that had been suddenly taken with a convulsion. Unwillingly he departed, leaving her to enjoy her epistle alone.

Three well covered sheets ! She was very sorry Henry had to leave her, but never mind, she could read it to him when he returned ; and meanwhile it was with a positive sense of luxury that, having at last found the beginning, (Blanche had put it up very

carelessly, she thought, leaving the first page in the inside of one of the sheets,) she proceeded eagerly to devour the contents.

It commenced with a slight excuse for not writing, the reason of which Kate would understand as she read on, and immediately plunged then into a description of Edward's arrival; and of the beautiful stranger whom he had brought with him. Kate was made to participate in all the astonished bewilderment which Blanche herself had felt, and finally relieved of the same in the course of the fourth page, by hearing the true circumstances of the case. Then came a relation of Ximena's illness: the horrible fright Blanche had been in when she found her insensible. Frank's and the Doctor's cruel modes of restoring consciousness; Ximena's amazement when, on becoming fully awake, she found her head, hands and feet so painful as to shrink at the gentlest touch, and was informed that she had only been kept alive by the applications which had reduced them to that condition.

'She is still suffering,' the letter continued, 'with a slow fever, which the doctor says is not dangerous, but may "hang on" for weeks, unless her mind can be roused and interested; as it is mental depression, far more than bodily illness, which is the matter with her. I can well understand this; and I endeavor, but vainly, to interest and amuse her. Alas! I know too well, from experience, how fruitless it is to expect her to be anything but depressed and miserable. But she is so gentle and uncomplaining that I often feel like crying over her in very pity. And oh, Kate, she is such an exquisite creature! It is no exaggeration to call her perfectly beautiful. I used to think your eyes and hair the finest I ever saw, but, begging your pardon for the confession, hers are the handsomest! And then she is so graceful! The peculiar grace of the

Creole. Her mother, as I believe I told you above, was a Kentuckian, and her father a Mexican, but of pure Castilian blood. It is strange, is it not, that her uncle was not in New Orleans to meet them? I suppose there has not been time yet for an answer to Edward's and Papa's letter to him. Edward wrote when they first landed, and papa a day or two after they reached here. I quite dread for a letter to come. I shall dislike so to part with Ximena. *Ximena!* Don't you think it a pretty name? She has the sweetest voice I ever heard. I do wish you could see her, Kate! Try and persuade Henry to bring you over, if only for a week, will you not? I do so long to see you, Katydid! short as the time is since you left me. I was so lonely and miserable after you went, notwithstanding dear Frank's watchful affection. Kate, I often feel as if I am not good enough to be Frank's wife. He is *so* noble and excellent. But I suppose I must console myself for my deficiencies by the reflection that I never saw any one who *was* worthy of him.'

There was a break in the letter here, and it commenced again under a different and later date:

'Thursday. Kate, I feel as if I had been the most selfish being that ever existed for months past! To papa, to yourself and to Frank! How more than kind and indulgent you have all been to me!—and I have requited you by making you as uncomfortable as I could with my unchastened grief! Oh, how little do we see and know ourselves! How blind we are! It is as if scales had just dropped from my eyes!

'This morning after breakfast I was sitting with Ximena, who is still in bed, trying to get her to talk, or to listen while I read to her. She has seemed perfectly listless—apathetic—indifferent and unobservant of everything. Augustus knocked at the door, and

said that Father Lebrun was down stairs. He has been very sick, you know. This is the first time he has been able to come out for more than a month. Of course I hurried down to him immediately; and I told him about Ximena, begging him to try if he could not move her, as no one else has succeeded in even exciting her attention. The doctor, and papa—who comes in to see her every day—and Juanita, and myself have all failed. So I brought him up. She was lying with her eyes closed, as usual, when we came into the room. But she opened them, and looked up with more interest than I have ever seen her manifest before, at the very first words of the priest. He sat down by the bed, put his hand on her head and blessed her, and then began to talk to her—of her grief and the cause of it. I cannot tell you what he said, Kate. No doubt it was what he has said to me again and again. But we often hear things without comprehending them; and how much more easy it is to see a fault in others than in one's self! Grief is blind as well as selfish—for I never was aware before how entirely regardless of the comfort of others I have been in the indulgence of my sorrow. Father Lebrun's admonitions to poor Ximena applied to myself far more forcibly than to her; for her grief is more recent, and she is so alone! so desolate! *She* has no one, as I have, to whom she owes the duty of cheerfulness and resignation. As the Father spoke I saw her lips begin to tremble. She glanced up at me, and we both burst into tears. He—but I will not attempt to repeat his words. I hope that neither Ximena or myself will forget them. As one of the first results of the resolution I made while he was speaking, I have come to finish this letter and set your mind at ease—for I know you will be surprised and uneasy at not hearing. And all through my careless

selfishness in thinking so much more of myself than of any one else! My darling Kate, you must forgive me! When I remember how cold and indifferent I was to you, while you staid away from Henry so long to be with me, I actually hate myself! So many things that my dear, dear mother said to me when she was dying, that I have not thought of since, come back to my recollection now! Do you not remember how she begged me not to grieve as if I thought I should never see her again, but to think of her cheerfully, as—

‘How could I have forgotten all this, Kate? I will not forget it again. You shall see that I will not. •

‘I know you are wondering how Edward and myself get on since his return. You remember I was determined to be easy and friendly with him when he came home? Well, I declare I have tried to be so, but I find it almost impossible to make any progress towards acquaintance even with him. He does call me by my name now sometimes, and seems inclined to be friends with me—but he blushes and starts so every time I speak to him, that really out of compassion I let him alone generally. The other morning I went into the library to see if I could find a book that would be likely to amuse Ximena, and he happened to be there. I am sure you would have laughed as I did when I told him about it afterwards, had you seen the spasmodic efforts which he made to talk a little. I asked him if he could recommend a book to me as I wanted one to read to Ximena. He looked about, without in the least knowing what he was doing, evidently, and presently brought me—what do you suppose?—a volume of *Ure's Dictionary of Arts*! Of course, I looked surprised, and, I am afraid, amused; and when he looked at it again and saw what it was, his confusion was painful. I tried to

laugh it off, as you used to advise, telling him that the studies which pleased him were rather too profound for Ximena and myself, and taking up some other book, I left him. I am afraid we never shall learn to be sociable with each other, for though I try, I and believe he does too, the case seems hopeless. However, we shall not be together much longer to worry each other—for Frank was telling me last night that we positively must *go home* in December. And though I hate, oh, so much! to leave poor papa, I cannot refuse to consent. Dear Frank! he has been so patient, and kind, and considerate! I wonder if there is another as *unadulteratedly* noble heart in the whole world! I doubt it. There is not a spot or blemish in his nature. He has all the gentleness and self-forgetfulness of woman, with the courage and firmness of man. I was so struck with this when Ximena was in such danger the other night. Most men, under the circumstances, would have been perfectly helpless—would have thought that to send for the doctor was all they were called upon to do. Dr. Eldridge said he could not have treated the case better himself than Frank did, and that if he had not been so prompt as he was she must have died. Oh, Kate, just think if she had! I am sure I never should have forgiven myself for not watching her more closely. They all say if there was any fault about it the doctor was to blame. He says so himself. That he ought to have inquired more particularly whether she was accustomed to taking opiates. It seems that she never could, they effect her so powerfully. She took very little *veratrum* comparatively to what is usually given; but the weak state she was in, from having lived almost without food for so long, as well as this idiosyncrasy of hers, caused the mischief. She has promised me to try and eat something to-morrow,

and the doctor is going to bring her an iron tonic. This afternoon is the first time I have seen her smile—just for a moment—but how it lighted up her face! I actually looked with wonder at her beauty. And did you ever know anythig as perverse and unnatural as Edward's not having fallen in love with her? At least Frank says he has not. That he was very much provoked at our suspecting him of the weakness, when they came. But I can scarcely credit such insensibility. I do think it will be too bad if he lets such a charming commencement for a romance end in nothing, instead of endeavoring to win Ximena, if only that papa should not be left entirely without a daughter. My love to Henry, and write soon, Kate.

Affectionately, BLANCHE.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER CLOUDS COME SUNSHINE.

Father Leburn's visit to Hollywood, which was to have been of a few days duration only, was prolonged to a month. Blanche obtained from Dr. Eldridge, on his visit to Ximena, the morning after the Priest's arrival, a medical opinion that change of air was absolutely necessary to the speedy recovery of his Reverence's health, and as this opinion was given sincerely, perhaps the Priest heeded it somewhat. But a much greater inducement to him to lengthen his stay was the perception that the moral atmosphere of the house needed brightening. Mr. Clerville was always grave now, his face reminding Father Leburn of what it had been for years after the death of his first wife. Blanche was pale, sad, subdued, Edward was looking thin, haggard and wretched.

And Frank, who was the one spring of light and anything like cheerfulness in the house, often now reflected in his face at least the thoughtfulness of sorrow. Ximena was worst of all; in general, perfectly apathetic; occasionally, almost wild with grief.

Wisely and gently, as one accustomed to ministering to minds diseased, did the Priest set himself to the task of correcting the evil. He wrought as much by example and the unstudied teachings that fell from his lips as by direct precept and admonition. His manner was ever so simply, innocently cheerful—with nothing in it to shock or offend the most saddened spirit, but soothing, genial—winning insensibly first to sympathy, then to participation in his child-like submission to, trust in the Father above. Soon Mr. Clerville's brow relaxed from its settled gravity. Frank was all himself again. Blanche's step regained its elasticity, a faint but most lovely color began to steal into her late pale cheek, and her smile, if not so joyous, was as bright as of old. Even Ximena, though oppressed at times by the most hopeless anguish, exerted herself, with some success, to be patient, to some degree cheerful.

But with Edward it was different.

He considered himself 'misused of Fate'—a miserable man. He could not study by day—he could not sleep by night. He lost all appetite, and smoked incessantly. His father's former apprehensions about his health were revived in full force, and he regretted very much (as Edward himself did most heartily) that he had returned home. Had he not feared that the journey to Mexico, at this season of the year, would be dangerous—more especially as the *vomito* was prevailing to a considerable extent in Vera Cruz—Mr. Clerville would have proposed his rejoining Mr. Lysle. He tried to persuade him to go to some of

the many pleasant watering-places that are scattered throughout the fair Southland, offering himself to be his companion in the excursion. But the young gentleman was obstinate in his rejection of this plan. He had a perverse satisfaction in being miserable, and, as he was laboring under the very worst form of the malady with which he was afflicted, a relapse—always more violent and dangerous than a first attack—he was to that degree infatuated that he could not resolve to tear himself from the torturing fascination of Blanche's presence. He lived but in his stolen glances at her face, in the sound of her voice and footsteps, in hearing his name occasionally from her lips, and sometimes speaking her own. Perfectly careless of everything else around him, he went on his gloomy way unimpressed by the cheering influence to which the real grief of the others yielded.

In the inevitable progress of Ximena's grief from thought only of the dead to a recollection of herself, Blanche was affected to perceive that even in contemplating the loneliness of her position, it was not of herself so much that she seemed to think as of the distress it would have been to her mother, could she have anticipated that the child whom she had always shielded so carefully from the lightest discomfort should be thus left unthought of by her natural protectors—abandoned entirely to the care of strangers. The consciousness of this fact seemed to strike her suddenly one day. She inquired for the first time about her uncle, General Walworth, and appeared as much offended as surprised when she learned that no information concerning him had been received. With far more decision of manner than is usually found in one of her age, she requested that no farther application should be made to General Walworth on her behalf, saying that she would return to Mexico to her

uncle, Don Miguel Yarrasa, as soon as she was well enough to travel.

'You know,' she observed, seeing the doubtful expression of Blanche's face at this declaration, 'that with my nurse and her husband, I can very well make the journey.' After a pause, she added: 'How strangely it must have looked to you, Blanche, my coming here with your brother; but I really did not know what I was doing. I have no distinct recollection of anything from the time—' she burst into tears, but dried them quietly, and went on: 'all that dark, dark time is like the dim images of a half forgotten dream to me. I cannot even remember your brother's name.'

'Edward.'

'Yes—and the other name! I never heard it.'

'Clerville.'

'I blush to think what an idea Mr. Clerville must have conceived of me. He could not but have considered it very singular that——'

Blanche here interposed, protesting against her perplexing herself while she was ill with thinking of anything but getting well.

'Here are some fruits and flowers I have brought you, and you must enjoy and admire them for me. Don't you like flowers?'

She took a beautiful moss rose-bud from the vase, and put it in the passive fingers.

'I used to love them passionately, but I think I do not care for any thing now. All earth seems dark to me.'

'You must not give way to these sad feelings. It is almost impossible to control them, I know, but we must think of what Father Leburn says.'

'Yes—I try. I have been very simple, I fear, in yielding to such unchastened feelings as mine have been, but——'

The dark eyes began to overflow, and her sentence was not finished. She held up the rose-bud to examine its beauty. As she did so, the appearance of her hand seemed to strike her. She extended it from her, turning it around, and said to Blanche, with a faint smile, 'Did you ever see such a hand?'

Blanche took it in her own, and rubbed the back of it a moment: 'You know all this discolored skin will come off soon, and leave it fresh and fair. It will be prettier than it was before we spoiled it so.'

'Dear Blanche, how kind you have been!—how good—'

'Then it is your turn to be good now,' interrupted Blanche, laughingly. 'See—does not this look tempting?'—she pointed to a pretty silver filigree basket on the table beside the bed, which contained oranges, bananas and crimson-cheeked peaches, all peeping forth from amid the deep-green, fragrant leaves of the orange tree. There was a small silver plate and fruit knife by the basket. Blanche peeled a peach, an orange and a banana, and laying them in the plate, placed it within reach of Ximena's hand. 'Frank came up the river last night, and brought these bananas for you. They are unusually fresh and nice, I think. Will you not let me tell him that I left you eating one? I am going down stairs in a moment to get the book I was telling you about.'

Ximena smiled and took up the banana. 'Frank?' she repeated, 'that is—no—' she hesitated.

'Not Edward, your traveling companion. Frank is his brother.'

Ximena was resolutely cheerful from that time, and her health improved steadily, but very slowly, she thought. She never alluded again to General Walworth, but spoke frequently of her intended return to Mexico. Blanche was more and more charmed with

her as their acquaintance matured to friendship during the long summer days when she sat beside her bed, sometimes reading to her, but oftener talking; and each making the other familiar with her own past life. Ximena told her friend of the old lands, where her happy childhood had fled away like a fairy dream of joy; and of her native home—that clime of the sun, Mexico, which she seemed to regard with a sorrowful yet passionate love—the love with which a patriot looks upon the country which he must pity instead of glory in. And Blanche spoke, too, of her childhood, but more particularly of the period which followed her mother's marriage, when she first came to dear Hollywood; of Lucy, and Kate, and Daredevil—and, of course, of Frank and Edward. And both learned to talk, first in low sad whispers, but gradually with calm and cheerful spirits, of the similar sorrow which had turned all their joy to mourning.

Mr. Clerville had visited Ximena often in her own room; but it was amusing to observe the characteristic difference between Frank's and Edward's greetings to her the first time she appeared down stairs. Frank offered his hand and spoke with such cordial friendliness that Ximena felt easy and at home with him at once. Edward, by a desperate effort of resolution, and in a pitiable state of confusion, presented himself in the sitting-room to make his compliments to her. She half rose to meet him—warm thanks for his kindness to her ready upon her lips—but on seeing his ceremonious, ~~at~~ seemed to her cold manner, she was silent; whilst he, with much embarrassment, expressed his pleasure at seeing her again, and at the improvement in her health. Every human being carries about him, or her, a certain moral atmosphere. A kindly and genial nature diffuses around itself a

a glow of warmth and pleasure, like a sunbeam which illumines all upon which it falls. But there are faces that, like a London fog creeping into a drawing-room, chill, dim and dampen everything around. Edward's presence in the sitting-room was not that of a sunbeam; and though Frank soon managed to do away the slight *gene* that followed his entrance, they all felt it a relief when he rose and left the apartment. His attentions to Ximena from that time consisted of invariably blushing and bowing when he entered her presence; a sight edifying to Blanche, inasmuch as she took it for an entire refutation of the idea she had once entertained as to his sentiments towards herself. Whenever that recollection recurred to her now, it was with a laugh and a blush at the vanity—so she considered it—which had given rise to such a suspicion.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A GLIMPSE BENEATH THE SURFACE.

It was with no little difficulty that Ximena was prevailed upon, by the united arguments and entreaties of her friends, to forego her intention of returning to Mexico immediately on her recovery. Mr. Clerville represented the extreme probability—the positive certainty, he considered it—that General Walworth had been prevented from receiving the letters addressed to him by absence from *Comé*. It was the season when most Southerners forsake their too sunny homes for a mountain or northern climate. He reminded her that her mother had committed her to Edward's care, to be delivered to the guardianship of her uncle—of the anxiety which she had manifested

to leave a country torn to pieces by civil factions—asked if Ximena thought that she would wish her daughter to return thither alone, when, too, the health of her uncle, Don Miguel, rendered it doubtful whether he would, even if living, be able to afford her protection in such a land—and ended by strongly advising her to wait at least until the fall before condemning General Walworth finally, or believing that he could be guilty of so singular a disregard of the wishes of his sister and welfare of his niece. Blanche asked, with affectionate reproach, how Ximena could think of leaving her, when she knew she loved her so much? and the doctor, when appealed to on the subject by her, pronounced the scheme altogether inadmissible. The state of her health, the warmth of the season and the existence of *vomito* at Vera Cruz, all forbade the idea, he said. Instead of this long journey, he should recommend daily short ones on horseback, both for Miss Yarassa and Miss Blanche.

Blanche had always been in the habit of riding a great deal, but since the death of her mother she had entirely discontinued this favorite exercise. It was associated in her mind with all pleasant memories and exhilarating emotion, and seemed inappropriate to her present depressed state of spirits. Once or twice Frank had suggested a ride, thinking it might bring back the rose to her cheek; but she evidently shrank so at the proposal, that he did not insist. She agreed to it when urged by the doctor, entirely on Ximena's account, and with some persuasion induced the latter to consent likewise.

Frank would have ordered the horses for that same afternoon—but Blanche informed him that he was too precipitate in his expectations. Neither Ximena or herself possessed that very necessary equipment, a riding habit, of the right color; as neither of them

had ridden since they went into mourning. Blanche said she could write down to Madame B——, the fashionable *modiste* who supplied all her requirements in the way of dress, and obtain them. But it would take at least a week for her letter to reach New Orleans, and the habits to be made and sent up.

‘It will be all the better, however,’ she said, ‘as I really do not believe Ximena is strong enough yet for the exertion. I will go and write immediately.’

She went to Ximena’s room to consult her as to the mode and material of dresses.

‘Just let Juanita get me one of your dresses that fits well, to send to Madame B—— for her to make by. She keeps my patterns. Now what do you think will be the best material?’ she continued, as, after ringing the bell for Juanita, she came and sat down to the table near Ximena.

‘I really do not know,’ answered the latter. ‘Cloth is too heavy for summer—and bombazine too light for a habit.’ She looked sad, as she always did when any allusion was made to her dress.

‘Yes, bombazine is entirely too light. And besides anything worsted, even *berege*, is unendurably warm—to me, that is. If we could get some lustreless linen! I always prefer linen for a summer riding habit. Suppose I tell her to get linen if she can? Would you like it?’

Ximena assented.

‘It can be lined throughout with the same, so that the skirt will hang well. I think it very likely Madame B—— may have some herself. She imports her things direct from Paris. But if she can’t get linen what had she better take?’

‘Would it be safe to leave it to her own selection?’

‘Oh yes, that would be wisest, I expect,’ replied Blanche, smiling. ‘She has unimpeachable taste—

and the only fault I ever had to find with her is that she trims a little too much. Her things are in good taste always—but I do not like too elaborate trimming on anything—particularly mourning.’

‘Juanita,’ said Ximena, as the woman entered, in answer to the bell, ‘get a dress of mine that fits well, and then — I want some money.’

‘Never mind about the money now,’ said Blanche smiling. ‘Wait until Madame sends her bill. Lustreless black linen,’ she went on with her memorandum—‘or if this cannot be procured, —’

A knock at the door, and the announcement of dinner interrupted her at this point of her consultation. Are you coming down?’ she said, rising—‘or shall I send your dinner? I think you look as if you did not care to walk down stairs. I will send it.’

Ximena smiled, and confessed that she felt either languid or lazy—she did not know which.

‘What horse can she ride, Frank,’ inquired Blanche, as they were discussing the matter at dinner.

‘Marmion and your own Jessica are both very gentle. Perhaps Jessica would do best until we see what sort of horseman she is. Or, Edward, you might offer her her compatriot, Mexicana. You have not seen Mexicana yet, have you Blanche? She is a beautiful creature.’

‘Yes, I have seen her several times at a distance, when you were riding her. She is a perfect beauty.’

‘Like her fair countrywoman, of the old proud Spanish blood,’ said Frank, laughing. ‘No mere Mexican mustang; no ignoble admixture or dilution of the noble fluid.’

‘I am sure there is no dilution of it in Ximena’s veins,’ said Blanche.

‘By the way,’ cried Frank, suddenly, ‘how am I to manage about attendance on you two ladies?’

Edward, you will have to make an effort of gallantry, and be Miss Yarassa's cavalier.'

'Yes, my son,' said Mr. Clerville—'I think it would be proper for you to do this. I fear the young lady may consider that you have not been as attentive to her as the circumstances of your acquaintance demanded, and this will be an excellent opportunity to rectify past omissions.'

'I am sorry you think I have been deficient in proper attention to Miss Yarassa, began Edward, in a very constrained voice—but ——'

'You see,' exclaimed Frank, intertuping him with a laugh, 'I cannot very conveniently multiply or divide myself, so as to attend Blanche and the young lady both. Now, to your great credit be it acknowledged, you began your career of knighthood by playing *prieux chevalier* to Miss Yarassa, and you must continue it. We cannot possibly dispense with your assistance.'

The argument seemed unanswerable—and so Edward did not utter the protest that was glued fast on the tip of his tongue to the roof of his mouth; but he verily thought that Miss Yarassa must certainly have been born to be the plague of his life, and a question did arise for a moment in his mind, as to what he should do in the event of his brother's and father's informing him that it was incumbent upon him to propose for Miss Yarassa's hand some fine day. Really, what with their obstinate belief that he was in love with her—and their exaggerated ideas of the attention due to her from him, it would not be very strange if they should come to this conclusion. He asked Frank privately if he was serious in wishing to inflict such a mutual penance on the young lady and himself as his attendance, he was sure, would prove. Frank answered by repeating seriously what he had said in

jest; that he himself could ride with but one of the two girls at a time, and Edward's company was therefore indispensable—unless he wished the whole pleasure of the thing spoiled to them, by their not being able to go together. Edward made no farther resistance—and fate rewarded him for his virtuous endurance in a manner as unexpected as it was ecstaticising.

The riding habits made their appearance in due time, and on the afternoon of the same day the horses were ordered, and Edward was notified that his hour of trial had arrived. Blanche came down stairs before Ximena was ready, and seeing Frank just entering the library, followed him.

She sat down on the first chair she came to, and laying her handkerchief and whip on the table beside her, began to put her gloves on as she said :

‘Frank cannot you ride with Ximena? It is a great sacrifice in me to relinquish your company, but I am sure she would enjoy the ride so much more with yourself than Edward for an attendant.’ -

Frank did not look very much pleased at the proposal; Blanche, glancing at him, and perceiving which, added: ‘You see Edward is always so silent and reserved that Ximena, who does not understand that it is only his way, is worried at it. She thinks, as I used to about myself, that he dislikes her, and it spoils all the pleasures she would otherwise have in riding, the idea that he is an unwilling escort. So I concluded to be very magnanimous, and get you to go with her, leaving her gloomy cavalier to myself.’

‘Of course, if you wish it,’ answered Frank.

‘That is not a very gracious assent,’ said Blanche, smiling, as having finished fitting on her gloves, she looked up. ‘Just wait until you see the brilliant smile with which Ximena will welcome the change,

and then regret it if you can. I am sorry you persuaded Edward to join our riding parties.'

'Why?' asked Frank, laughing.

'Because he evidently dislikes it so much. And I have given out all hope of his and Ximena's falling in love with each other.'

'You really expected it?'

'Certainly. I consider it beyond expression, provoking and incomprehensible in him, at least, in not doing so. If I was a man I should be raving about her.'

'I think you rave about her as it is. I am sure I hear so constantly of her perfections, that I am growing jealous.'

'Are you?' she cried, laughingly. 'But is not her face enough to excuse any one for raving about it? I can account for Edward's singular stupidity only in one or two ways.'

'How is that?' enquired Frank, much diverted.

'Either he is a man of marble, without even the pretence of a heart, or he must have been jilted very badly some time, and become a woman-hater in consequence. You know men sometimes are so unjust as to attach the sins of one individual to the whole sex. Did you ever hear of anything of the kind with him?'

Frank laughed outright, and looking round, said:

'Come forward, Edward, and answer to the grave charges preferred against you.'

Blanche turned also, and saw Edward standing in one of the alcoves behind her.'

'Oh, Frank, why did you not tell me that he was there?' she exclaimed. Rising hastily, she walked towards him. 'I am so sorry, Edward, that you heard my nonsense. I was only jesting.'

Her words had wounded him deeply, but he forced

himself to smile through his pangs, as he begged that she would be under no concern about it.

'I am so conscious that I deserve far heavier censure than you have given to my stupidity, that I could not be so unjust as to be offended.'

'Oh pray do not repeat that word! I assure you I was but jesting.'

'Many a true word is spoken in jest. But I will not inflict the tediousness of my attendance on Miss Yarassa. My sole reason for having agreed to Frank's proposal to accompany you, was the belief that, by so doing, I prevented what is generally considered an undesirable awkwardness—a party of three.'

Despite his endeavor to speak lightly, there was in his voice a tone of bitterness, which Blanche attributed to a sense of irritation at what she had said. Though she colored slightly at the last part of his sentence, she went close to him, and laying her hand on his arm, while she looked up to his face with earnest entreaty and exclaimed:

'Dear Edward, do not punish me for that thoughtless speech, by taking it seriously! I am sure you will not make me so uncomfortable, as I shall be if you do not go with me. It is myself, not Ximena, I ask you to go with. You are not going to refuse?'

He hastened to assure her that he was quite ready to attend her, if she really desired it; but there was a bitter throb at his heart as he thought of the 'magnanimous sacrifice' she was making, in giving up Frank's escort for his own.

'Then you must be very good natured and entertaining,' she said, in her old arch tone, 'or I shall think you have not forgiven me.' She walked out of the room, Edward following.

Ximena and Frank were standing beside the horses waiting for them. The former had approached Mexi-

cana, who had been saddled for Blanche, by Edward's orders, and was putting the white star upon her forehead, repeating her name, and murmuring words of caressing fondness in the liquid Spanish tongue. The animal seemed to recognize the familiar sounds. She put back her small, high-bred ear as if to listen ; bent forward her head, moving restlessly, manifesting every symptom of intelligence and pleasure.

'See—she knows the sweet tones of the native land,' said Ximena. 'Mexicana, Mexicana, we are exiles both ; but I shall see the golden sands and the silver waters soon, while you must languish ever in the cold land of the stranger!'

She laid her face down on the shining neck of the animal, to conceal the tears that started to her eyes.

'Are you going to ride Mexicana?' said Blanche, who had come to her side unperceived. 'Is she perfectly gentle, Frank?'

'No ; I am to ride Jessica, I believe. Did you not say so Mr. Clerville? Mexicana is for you, Blanche.'

'But you know we are to change escorts, and why not horses, too, if you would like to ride Mexicana? Did not Frank tell you that he is to be your attendant?'

'No—he did not tell me.'

Brilliant indeed was her smile, as she turned a glance of inquiry towards him ; and very beautiful did she look when, mounted on the little Mexican mare, she cantered off with him, leaving Edward and Blanche following at a slower pace. Frank certainly would have preferred the arrangement which he had himself proposed, but he did not think it necessary to manifest his discontent by a silent or constrained manner. They passed swiftly along the cool, shady road he had selected, exchanging a word occasionally, but not

talking much, for a canter is not very propitious to conversation. He remembered soon that Ximena was an invalid, and, laying his hand on Mexicana's rein, checked her speed, and that of his own horse at the same time, as he said, with a smile: 'I shall not be able to answer to Blanche, Miss Yarassa, for my neglect of her earnest injunctions, if you return home exhausted instead of improved by your ride. Would it not be prudent to moderate our pace?'

'I suppose so,' she answered; 'though Mexicana goes so easily; but, it is true, I am not very strong yet.'

The exercise had already brought a glow, bright as the bloom of the pomegranate, into her clear dark cheek. Frank thought of the compliment of the Irish hod-carrier, on restoring to a lady her parasol, which had been blown out of her hand by a high wind, and felt inclined to say: 'Faith, if you were as strong as you are handsome, you could ride from here to Jerico without fatigue.' He did not, however, indulge the inclination, but merely remarked—

'We must not go too far this first time of testing your strength. The sun is rather warm, I fear; but, as this road is very shady—'

'Oh, not at all too warm for me,' interrupted Ximena. 'You forget that I am a child of the Sun, and do not shrink from his rays as you of a colder clime do. It is impossible, I presume, for any one but a native of the tropics, to conceive the love which they who are born beneath his vertical beams bear to the grand luminary. I have always sympathized strongly with his Persian worshippers. Unenlightened by revelation, as they were, it seems to me that their religion was much more natural and rational than that of any other heathen nation.'

'I am not sure but that it may,' answered Frank;

'for if we contrast it with the Assyrian and Egyptian mummeries of worship, or even with the poetical Mythology of the Greeks and Romans, how far simpler, more sublime, this adoration of the visible and actual spring of Light and Life, than the blind, half-credulous, half-skeptical superstitions of others! The Gheber saw that when his God drew near and looked down with dazzling countenance, Earth wakened beneath his smile. Her brown bosom smiled back emerald green; leaves expanded; flowers burst into bloom and fragrance; fruits swelled and matured; grain sprang up and ripened; all life welcomed his approach rejoicingly! It is not strange that the mind of the materialist (and, in one sense, all pagans are necessarily materialists!) should have attached to this radiant, this seemingly sentient presence, the idea of Deity. In the morning he came, they knew not from whence; in the evening he went, they knew not whither! and this was MYSTERY. Sometimes, for a season, he departed to a distance from them: so that his beams were pale and cold, and Nature languished until when he listed, he returned. This was POWER. And for ages, unwearied and changeless, had his "burning eye" looked down on the generations of men, and his beneficent light shed blessings upon them! This was IMMORTALITY! Mystery—power—immortality! the three great attributes of Divinity. Yet, for heathen, their creed was not an irrational one.'

'Thank you for having-developed my idea,' said Ximena, smiling. 'I never thought of the rationale of the system before, but merely considered it poetically with admiration; perhaps because the Aborigines of my own land, as well as those of Peru, were as much Fire-Worshippers as were the Persian Magi of old. Every thing which relates to the history,

past or present, of my unfortunate country, has for me a mournful, but very deep interest.'

She spoke sadly, ending with a sigh, and, as if to change the subject, glanced back, expecting to see their companions approaching. They were not in sight.

'They must ride very slowly,' she observed, with some surprise. 'I thought they would have joined us before now.'

'I thought so. But it is possible that they may have gone another way. There is a fork half a mile back, and, if they have, we shall not see them at all during our ride, as the roads diverge widely. I did not think to provide against the probable contingency of our taking different directions, by settling, before we started, which way we should go.'

His conjecture was correct. Edward and Blanche had taken an opposite course to the one chosen by himself; or, rather, their horses, finding themselves perfectly at liberty to exercise their own taste and judgment in the matter, had, after putting their noses together in consultation for a moment, taken this course, without the fact having been observed by the pre-occupied riders. They had never before been *tete-a-tete* for more than a few minutes at a time, and both felt the strangeness and awkwardness of the position. Added to this, each was meditating an explanation which it was difficult to commence. Blanche spoke first.

'You must have thought it very impertinent of me Edward, to be talking of you as I did, but—'

'You were indignant at my insensibility to the charms of Miss Yarassa,' he said with a forced smile, as she hesitated. 'It is true that I cannot behold her with your vision; but is it just for this reason, to deem me cold—without a heart?'

Blanche smiled. 'Perhaps not,' answered she, 'though it does seem to me impossible that any man who did have a heart, could be thus insensible.'

'*I have a heart, Blanche!*' he exclaimed, in a tone and with a glance that caused her cheek to pale, and her pulses to stand still for a moment. He saw it, and inwardly cursing the folly which had so nearly betrayed the secret he was resolved to confine forever to his own bosom, he went on rapidly: 'You remind me, very, very, strikingly, of one who was—who must ever remain—the sole possessor of that heart; and, therefore, I am not willing for you to esteem me the man of marble you said.' Blanche's face cleared, she turned with a glance unembarrassed and sympathizing, as he continued: 'Some men are called cold because they do not offer incense at any or every shrine they pass. But this is unjust. Either they may find no altar which they deem holy enough for the fire that is in their hearts, or, laying it upon one abide by it forever, though the shrine be cold, the fire go out!'

'I remember a story or a fable, which I read once of an Eastern monarch, who, surrounded by all the pride, pomp and glory of his royal estate, sighed yet ceaselessly for one thing which was wanting to fill the measure of his content. One thing, not denied to the humblest of his slaves, but which he, the lord of them all, could not command—the magic of LOVE. Fair faces were around him—seraph forms, and star-like eyes, and voices of music. But nor face, nor glance, nor tone, could waken in his heart a single throb of passion. He turned coldly from them all, and laid down for a time his sceptre, put from his brow its diadem, and went forth a wanderer over the face of earth, to seek the one, the only presence, that

owned for him the so passionately desired spell. In palace, in hall, in hut, he sought it! but long sought he vainly. Crossing oceans, traversing continents, wearying not, nor pausing, he held on his way; and at length he came "to an isle in undiscovered seas," a fair enchanted land it seemed, so wondrous beautiful it was, and found a garden, rich in all the luxuriant bloom of the tropics. The air breathed perfume; crystal streams flowed sparkling and rippling between banks of flower-enamelled green; birds, whose gorgeous plumage dazzled the eye, flitted and gleamed through the leafy shades; and there floated upon the breeze, that gently stirred tree and blossom, low strains of music, that seemed at times but the lulling monody of Ocean, and again swelled into soft airs of ærial harmony, exquisite as the music of the spheres! Roving through this scene of entrancing witchery, he approached a rare and stately pavilion. Silent was all around, and, with tread that half started at its own echo, he mounted the marble steps, and entered the open portals; and, at last—at last—before him was the presence he had been so long seeking! In a chair of state, under a regal canopy, sat a maiden sleeping; and as his eye rested upon her face, his heart, with a sudden and strong bound, started to life!—his toils and his weariness were forgotten!

'But vainly did he call on the sleeper to listen to his voice! Vainly did he clasp the passive hand, and press on the crimson lips most passionate kisses! Not for him would the slumberer awake. And while he stood gazing with spelled fascination upon her surpassing loveliness, another step drew near—another man entered the pavilion. As the foot-fall of the stranger sounded upon the threshold, the sleeper stirred. The wanderer watched with jealous agony

and saw the blue eyes that had remained sealed to him open now, with a beaming glance!—saw the hand that never returned his pressure, meet that of his rival!—heard the lips murmur, as it parted in a smile—‘It is of you, then, that I have been dreaming!’

‘He fled from the sight of a happiness that but mocked his despair! And never again did he seek, or know, the fatal dream of love!’

As he ceased speaking, Blanche withdrew her gaze from his face, where it had been fastened in a sort of charmed amaze. He was looking straight before him—nor had his eye met hers, since the effect of that first impulsive exclamation had warned him to put a guard upon both lip and glance. They rode on in silence for some time. At last she said softly,

‘And this is your own story?’

‘With a difference. I, alas, entered the pavilion too late! When the light of those blue eyes first flashed upon my soul the comprehension of that mystic emotion which we call love, they were smiling in the face of my rival!—for ere I ever saw her, she was predestined the wife of another.’

‘After a long pause he added, with a perceptible effort—‘Your face is paler—and the locks of your hair have a darker shade of gold, than that which glittered upon her ringlets; but yet, you are very like to this lost dream of mine, Blanche. Often when my gaze falls suddenly upon you, I start and shrink —

‘I may *seem* indifferent, insensible—but oh, Blanche, never think me cold!’

They relapsed again into silence: Edward wrapped in deep reverie—while Blanche felt as if wandering in a fairy land of enchantment, like the one described by him. Many times, and from many lips, had she heard addressed to her words of admiration—of love. But she had always listened with a sense of disap-

pointment, even impatience; for in them was no echo from that bright realm of passion and fancy, to which she ever looked so wistfully—the realm of ROMANCE. But now—it was not so much Edward's words as his impassioned tones, that opened to her a glimpse of this, to her, forbidden paradise. Her heart heaved; and from its depths there went out a silent cry—'And I shall never—*never*—hear tones like these! I must be content with the cold commonplace regard that knows not a thought of passion or of romance. He is different, oh! so different, to Frank.

A sharp pang of self-reproach here assailed her that she could, even in the solitude of her own heart, blame Frank. But no, she said, in answer to this reproof of conscience, she was *not* blaming him—she was only wishing that he loved her as Edward loved what he called his 'lost dream.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CROSS PURPOSES.

Alarmed by the narrow escape he had made of betraying to Blanche what he knew would distress her greatly—his hopeless passion—Edward did not again allude directly to the subject in their now daily *tête-à-tête* rides. But he talked freely of other things, securing, by that one effort of frankness, to have conquered almost entirely his reserve towards her. In much that he said there was a poetry and a pathos that interested Blanche exceedingly. There was a gentleness and timidity about his manner, too, that pleased her much; and his smile, which she now saw for the first time, she thought positively fascinating. It

was not a very mirthful smile—differing widely from Frank's in this particular—and it was not frequent; but it softened and irradiated his face, she thought, in a marvellous manner.

It was fortunate that his slight prevarication, of speaking of her present and former self as two different individualities, (a prevarication for which he afterwards bitterly reproached himself, it being the first time in his life that he had ever, even by the most indirect implication, departed from strict sincerity,) had dispelled her suspicion of his loving herself. Had she been aware of the truth, not all her affection for and sense of honor and fidelity towards Frank could have preserved her from at least a struggle of sentiment, so strong an impression had his words made upon her fancy. As it was, the interest which she now entertained for him was totally unalloyed by personal feeling. She admired and pitied him—thought that any man who was capable of one such passion as he had described his to have been must be capable of another—and her wish that he would marry Ximena became more lively than ever. They seemed formed for each other, she often said to herself, and to Frank, and she felt like quarrelling with both of them for their obstinate blindness to this fact. Though to set out deliberately with the intention of 'making a match' would have been a shocking idea to her, she was, quite unconsciously, endeavoring with all her might to take that alarming responsibility upon herself. She talked constantly of Edward to Ximena, and of Ximena to Edward. But the only effect of her eloquence was to make them more distant than they would otherwise have been in their manner to and intercourse with each other.

'My dear Blanche,' Ximena would say laughingly, 'you are laboring that point in vain. I do not doubt

but that Mr. Clerville possesses all the perfections you have enumerated. He was exceedingly kind to me—' her voice grew unsteady, 'and I am and ever shall be very grateful to him, particularly,' she added more cheerfully, 'for having brought me acquainted with yourself, but—'

'Well?' said Blanche, smiling.

'Are there not repulsions—I mean is there not such a thing as repulsion, as well as attraction, between certain people? Frank and yourself were attracted towards each other; Edward and myself are repelled by one another. There is not an atom of sympathy between us; and if not another man and woman existed in the world, we should never fall in love with each other, I do assure you.'

'But why?'

Ximena laughed. 'I cannot pretend to give you the "wherefore" of this "why,"' she answered; 'but pray let me ask one thing. I have always understood that in affairs of the heart it is the gentleman's place to take the initiative. Is it not so?'

'Of course,' replied Blanche laughingly.

'Then had I not better wait until Mr. Clerville gives some tokens of admiration for me before I think of a reciprocation of the sentiment?' she said archly.

Edward acknowledged that Miss Yarassa was very handsome. Beautiful, he supposed, she would be considered by any one who admired dark hair and eyes, which he confessed he did not. But he said, 'Some natures are like parallel lines. They may run side by side all their lives, and not be a hair's breadth nearer each other at the end than they were when they started. I think this is the case with your friend and myself.'

Blanche could not help smiling at this remark,

which she thought only a more gallant rendition of Ximena's repulsion idea.

One bright moonlight night towards the end of September, Ximena drew Blanche's arm within her own after tea, and they walked out into the flower garden. Lured by the beauty of the scene, they remained pacing up and down the wide gravel walks for a long time—sometimes silent, sometimes talking—until a message came from Frank to Blanche inquiring if she was not afraid for Miss Yarassa to stay out so late.

'Give Miss Yarassa's compliments to Mr. Clerville,' said Ximena lightly, 'and tell him she is no longer an invalid to be kept imprisoned in the house.'

'And tell him I say I think he might have bestowed the light of his own countenance upon us, instead of sending a message,' added Blanche.

As the servant departed with this reply, Ximena said, 'Frank seems to have a great deal of business to attend to of late. Excepting at dinner, during our afternoon ride, and at tea, I never see him at all now. He does not seem in good spirits, either. Have you not noticed this?'

'No,' answered Blanche with some surprise. 'I have not noticed that he is out of spirits. That would be very strange with him. But he is very busy indeed about some work he is having done at Picoana.'

She turned into a walk that led straight to the house.

'Are you going in?' said Ximena. 'I hope it is not on my account. There is not the least danger in my staying out.'

Blanche hesitated a moment, and then said frankly, with a slight laugh, 'By the truth is, I am so in the habit of doing exactly what Frank tells me, that

it is an involuntary impulse with me always to attend to any suggestion of his.'

'I have observed that his word is your law,' said Ximena smiling. 'What an obedient wife you will make!'

'I hope so,' she answered seriously.

'But I am not at all inclined to obey Mr. Frank's present behest, or command,' cried Ximena, in a wilful tone. 'I should like to stay out here all night, or at least until the moon wanes and pales. I always feel nearer to Heaven at night than in day time, particularly under the moon and starlight, and on the water. Did you not tell me, Blanche, that Frank used to take Kate and yourself on the river by moonlight a great deal? I wish we could go to-night! There he comes now, to meet us. Do you know I have gotten so in the way of calling him "Frank," in speaking to you, that I expect I shall do it to his face some day; and that would be shocking, as he is exceedingly punctilious in addressing me, in the most ceremonious manner, as "Miss Yarassa." I have been rather surprised at it, as he called me "Miss Ximena" at first.'

Before Blanche had time to reply, they met Frank. He lifted his hat with a grave smile, and Blanche did notice that his manner had none of its customary genial ease, but was serious and dignified.

'We were coming in as you advised,' she said to him, 'but the night is so beautiful that it seems a sin to shut one's self within four walls. Can you not take us on the river, Frank? It would be delightful!'

'Is it not too far for Miss Yarassa to walk?'

'I must protest against being still considered upon the sick list,' exclaimed Ximena. 'Since I have been riding, I have quite regained my strength. How far is it to the river?'

‘About half a mile.’

‘Why, that is nothing! I could walk twice the distance without fatigue. I received my education as a pedestrian in England, and pique myself on my powers in that way. I have often walked six or eight miles without suffering in the least from the exertion.’

‘There is a great difference between the climate of England and that of Louisiana,’ said Frank, smiling. ‘I think I had better order the carriage, Blanche.’

They both objected to this, declaring it altogether unnecessary.

‘Well,’ said Frank, ‘remember I do not take the responsibility of the affair, if Dr. Eldridge has to be summoned to repair the effects of it. I will see if I can find my brother, as we will need his assistance in rowing the boat; and, young ladies, let me recommend thick shoes for your walk.’

‘A good idea,’ said Blanche.

They all three proceeded to the house. Blanche and Ximena went for their shoes, while Frank sought Edward. When they met again in the hall a few minutes afterwards, Frank did not offer his arm to either of the girls, but, leaving them walking together, he sauntered at the side of Blanche. Edward, by the force of example, was constrained to take the same place next Ximena; and in this order of march they wended their way to the river side, scarcely a word being spoken from the time they set out until they came to where the boat lay.

Frank unfastened it, and looked to see that it was perfectly dry before assisting the girls to enter. It was the boat he had had built for Kate and Blanche at the time of Lucy’s marriage; but in the frequent use they made of it the summer following, the mast and sail had been found to be very much in the way. Frank had transformed it, therefore, to a row-boat.

It was a light thing, easily managed by one person, but with oars for two. Frank turned the prow up stream.

‘Are you going up the river?’ asked Blanche.

‘Yes. You know it is almost impossible, at this season, to pass the shoals at the lower end of the Island. We can row some distance up stream, and then rest on our oars and float back.’

No one spoke again for a long time, but the thoughts of each one of the four were busy—two with the past, two with the present.

Blanche thought of the many happy hours she had passed in this boat with Kate and Frank, when no sad memories had marred her enjoyment of the hour and scene, for her mother’s good-night kiss was waiting her at home. Heavy tears gathered in her eyes, so that she saw not the silver light upon the water, nor the deep black shadows of the banks on either side.

Ximena’s musings, too, were sorrowful—very sorrowful. Of nights when the moon shone on the blue billows of the Adriatic—when under the star-gemmed arching dome of Heaven, and in the shelter of parental love, she glided through the crystal streets of Venice. And her eyes, too, grew dim, and drops that sparkled in the moonlight fell on her black robe.

Edward gazed on the drooping face of Blanche. The folds of her dress swept against his knee as he sat beside her. He put from him all thought of the future, and lived, intensely, but in the present. He was not happy, for happiness is calm; but he gave himself up to a fever-dream of ecstasy.

The expression of Frank’s face was inexplicable, Ximena thought, as, looking up suddenly, her glance met his. He turned from the questioning gaze of her dark lustrous orbs, and again dipped his oars in the water.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DESPERATE CAST.

The next day brought a shock to several of the inmates of Hollywood. About the middle of the morning the same carriage which had conveyed Edward and Ximena from Scarsborough, drove once more to that hospitable door, and a lady and gentleman alighted from it. A few minutes afterwards, Blanche presented herself to Ximena, in the chamber of the latter, with a face in which congratulation and regret were singularly blended.

'What is the matter?' demanded Ximena, looking up from her book. 'How strangely you look, Blanche?'

'I have something to tell you.'

'Well, dear Blanche, quick!'

'Your uncle, General Walworth, is down stairs.'

Ximena started, and turned pale. She did not speak—but after a moment's struggle with her emotion, burst into tears. Blanche brought a goblet of water and offered her—but she put it aside, and leaned her face in silence upon her clasped hands for some time. At last she looked up.

'I ought to be glad,' she said, with a quivering attempt at a smile. 'It was my mother's wish. But to see him will bring back all the bitterness of grief again. And ——'

'Oh, I am so sorry, Ximena, if you have to leave me! What shall I do without you? I shall be as miserable as I was when you came! It seems selfish to want to keep you from your uncle, but—if you could spend the winter with me! or, any how, stay until the first of December! Won't you?'

'I do not know whether I can. I should prefer it.

Dear Blanche, I love you so—it will be a great pain to me to leave you.'

She rose. 'I ought to go down. Oh, how I dread it! I never saw my uncle but once—when I was a very little child. Did you see him, Blanche? What sort of person is he?'

'No—I did not see him. Papa came and told me to inform you of his arrival. His daughter is with him.'

'Ah? I must hurry.'

She bathed her face, smoothed her beautiful hair, stood before the mirror, and mechanically re-arranged her collar and brooch, and then laying her head on Blanche's shoulder for a moment, murmured again—'Oh, how I dread it! You will think it strange, but I dread almost equally my uncle's reminding me very much of my dear mother, or his not resembling her at all. He is only her half brother. You are coming down with me?'

'If you wish it.'

General Walworth was a fine old gentleman. Ximena's first hasty glance at him, as he rose to meet her on her entrance, re-assured the fears she had entertained that she 'might not like him.' His manner to her was so emphatically and affectionately paternal, that she would have been very unreasonable had she not been satisfied with it; and with his explanations and apologies for his unintentional neglect of her. Mr. Clerville's conjecture was correct. He had, with his family, been absent from home for the summer, and received neither the letter of his sister requesting him to meet her in New Orleans, nor those addressed to him later by Edward and Mr. Clerville, until his return in the fall. Fortunately, he said, having left home unusually early in the season, they had returned earlier also; and without resting a day from his late journey, he had hastened to answer

the letters in person—impatient to welcome the young orphan to his heart and home. His daughter was likewise unaffectedly pleasant and affectionate in her manner to her cousin; so that Ximena felt that she ought to be satisfied and happy.

At the urgent invitation of Mr. Clerville and Blanche, General and Miss Walworth consented to remain a week at Hollywood, to rest from their two previous journeys, before starting on their return to Kentucky—whither Ximena was to accompany them. Neither she or Blanche had agitated the question of her remaining with the latter—as both felt instinctively that General Walworth would be greatly pained by such a proposal; even if he consented to it. And so, with many promises of reciprocal visits in the future, they had reluctantly resigned themselves to a present separation—when, to their great delectation, Fate, in the person of Dr. Eldridge, obtained for them what they had not possessed the courage to attempt obtaining for themselves.

The Doctor, coming to make one of his occasional friendly visits, a day or two after the General's arrival, was introduced to that gentleman, and informed of the approaching departure of his interesting patient, Ximena. The doubtful expression of countenance with which he heard this intelligence, did not escape the observation of Blanche, who happened to be present.

‘You think, Doctor, that Ximena ought not to go to so cold a climate as that of Kentucky, at this season?’ she asked, quickly.

‘I think so, Miss Blanche. Miss Yarassa has a very *Southern* constitution, if I may so express myself. A cold climate would not agree with her—particularly just now, when her strength has been very much tried by the fever she had two months ago, and from

the effects of which she has not yet, and will not for some time recover.'

Blanche sprang to the side of General Walworth with one of her old impulsive movements, 'You hear, General?' she cried eagerly. 'Now I have not said one word before—not even privately to Ximena—of how much I wish her to stay with me this winter. But you see the Doctor considers it necessary for her health—and now won't you let her remain, if she will consent? Pray, pray, my dear General, tell me that you will!'

He smiled at her earnestness—but the next moment looked grave at her request—and at the opinion of the Doctor, by which it had been elicited.

'I wonder if this is not a concerted movement on the part of the Doctor and yourself, Miss Blanche?' he said jestingly. 'Did you not say a word to *him* privately on the subject?'

'No—I assure you. He will exonerate me from having done so. But do say that you will consent for Ximena to stay, if I can prevail on her.'

'I must hear what she has to say about it—and learn why it is that the Doctor thinks a cold climate would be injurious to her health. I trust,' he said, with a look of grave anxiety, 'that you have seen no tendency to pulmonary affection in my niece?'

'Not the slightest,' answered the Doctor smiling.

She is one of the persons whom I should have no hesitation in ensuring against consumption—present or future. Her *physique* almost precludes the possibility of it. But a tropical flower does not flourish if transplanted to a cold temperature. She would suffer very much from the climate.'

Ximena confessed, when questioned by her uncle, that she dreaded the cold climate of Kentucky—cold to any she had ever been accustomed to—as during

the many years which she had spent with her parents in Europe, they had always passed the winter months either in Italy or Spain. She said, too, that she *should* like to stay with Blanche this winter, as the latter wished her to be her bridesmaid when she was married.

'She is to be married, is she? I hope, my dear, that her example will not put the same idea into your head—as I cannot agree to giving you up entirely, so soon—after finding you so late. I thought the other day, when I was thanking young Clerville for his attention to you, that he blushed very suspiciously,' said her uncle.

'You need not be under the least apprehension on that account,' answered Ximena, laughingly. 'There is no admiration wasted between Mr. Edward Clerville and myself. He blushes from diffidence.'

'But he has a brother, has he not?' enquired Miss Walworth, archly.

Oh, yes; Frank. He is very different from Edward—a charming person. I am sorry he is not at home, as I should like you to know him. He went down to New Orleans on business the morning you came.'

'A charming person?' said her cousin.

'Very. But there is no danger to me in his charms,' she replied, laughingly, 'as it is to him that Blanche is engaged. I shall be perfectly safe here from the dangers you fear, uncle.'

It was finally concluded that she should spend the winter with Blanche, Mr. Clerville promising to, himself, take her to Kentucky in the spring.

General Walworth and his daughter left Hollywood before Frank returned. A letter from Blanche had apprised him of their arrival, and entreated that he would hurry home, in order to see Ximena before her

departure. Expecting him to attend to this request, Blanchè did not write again. Consequently he was ignorant of the later decision by which Ximena remained.

Blanche met him in the hall, with beaming face. His own manner was warmer than it had ever been to her, as he drew her into the sitting-room, which was vacant, pressed her almost passionately to his heart, and kissed her repeatedly.

'Are you really so very glad to see me?' she cried, laughingly, 'then why did you stay away so long?' Oh, Frank, I have such delightful news for you!

'Ah?' he said, smiling! 'But first you must tell me what I wish to hear more than any news that you could devise.' He lifted her left hand, and put on the third finger a massive ring. 'When am I to place this here at the command of Father Lebrun, Blanche?'

'You said in December, did you not?'

'Why wait so long?' He drew her to a sofa as he spoke, and sitting down, still holding her hand with the ring upon it, he continued: 'I am weary, Blanche, of this life we have been leading lately. I want you to be all my own. We—'

He started as if a scorpion had stung him, as looking up at the sound of a footstep, he saw Ximena, who had been about to enter the room, retreating hastily.

'You are surprised to see her, are you not?' exclaimed Blanche, in a joyous tone. 'This was the news I had for you. Only think how charming! She is to spend the winter with us. The doctor said positively that she ought not to go to that cold climate, and so her uncle agreed for her to stay until spring. But how strangely you look, Frank! Are you not glad? I thought you would be as pleased as I am.'

'Of course I am pleased that you are pleased,' he

answered with a forced smile, but I told you once before that I was jealous of Miss Yarassa. I see so little of you now, Blanche. I came home expecting to find you alone, thinking that we could take our rides and walks together, as formerly; and you must forgive me if I could not repress a slight sense of disappointment when I learned my mistake.'

She looked distressed. 'Dear Frank,' she said affectionately, 'you know that Ximena's society, or that of any one else, cannot console me for the loss of yours. I will stay with you any time, as much as you wish. And I tell you how we can manage about riding together, without interfering with our present arrangement for the afternoon. If you like, I will get up very early, and we can have a nice private ride before breakfast every morning.'

'If it is not too great an effort to you,' he answered smiling, 'I should like it.'

'Very well,' she replied, in a lively tone. 'But I have something else to tell you. More pleasant news. Dare and Lucy will be here to-morrow; instead of the last of the month, as we expected; and Kate and Henry the day after.'

Frank looked sincerely glad to hear this.

¶ Alas for the transitoriness of earthly joy! First the coming of the Walworth's, and then the visit of his relatives, broke in upon and destroyed the deceitful happiness with which Edward had suffered himself to be beguiled for a time. No more entrancing rides with Blanche for him! If he obtained one smile during the twenty-four hours, he thought himself singularly fortunate, engrossed, as she was, by his sisters. And then he had learned from Frank that their marriage would take place in December, perhaps even

this design, believing that his health required change of air, and that it had been much improved by his late journey there. But he stipulated that instead of setting out at once, as Edward fain would have done, he should wait until the season was more advanced.

Blanche was not disappointed in her expectation that Kate and Ximena would be perfectly fascinated with each other. Lucy, too, was delighted with the young Spanish girl, and agreed heartily with her sisters in their wonder and indignation at Edward's obtuse indifference to such rare charms.

Their visit of three weeks was drawing to a close. It had passed very pleasantly, except, as Kate constantly complained, that they saw almost nothing of Frank, who spent his whole time at Everona, his own plantation, sometimes Dare-Devil, and sometimes Lorimer, being his companion. He excused himself by saying how very busy he was with some final work he was having done; but Kate thought he might have deferred it until after they were gone.

The night before they were to start home, Lucy, after a lengthened feminine conference with Blanche and Kate, in the room of the former, retired to her own chamber, to find Dare walking up and down the floor in a very disturbed manner. He turned to the door as she entered, and telling her that he was going to take a smoke with Frank, hurried away. He did mechanically take his cigar-case from his pocket, as he walked quickly down the passage, and half opened it. But he put it back again when he reached the door of Frank's room. There he paused, and stood still for a little time, and his stout heart quailed, as, a few years later, it quailed not, when he led his regiment of Louisiana boys through many a day of bloody battle, for it was a desperate cast he was about

to make. He knocked, but without waiting for an invitation to enter, turned the bolt, and went in.

Frank was standing at an open window. He looked around the sound of the opening door, and seeing who the intruder was, glanced again out upon the moonlight. Deville came to his side.

'Frank,' he said, abruptly, 'if you saw me about to commit a very rash, a very wrong act, what would you do?'

'Remonstrate, and try to prevent it, of course,' replied he, briefly.

'Well, it is for this that I have come to you now. Have you fully estimated the folly, not to say criminality, of the act you are contemplating, Frank?'

The latter looked at him, startled, conscience-stricken. He did not answer.

'Is it either kind or just to Blanche to marry her, when you love another woman?' continued Deville, in a low, distinct voice.

Frank threw his face down upon his hand, and did not look up for several minutes. When he finally raised his head, Dare was almost shocked at the expression of his countenance.

'You have seen it then?' he muttered.

'I have seen it, and am surprised, amazed, that you can suffer yourself to be so deluded by a sense of false generosity; it must be this which influences you, as to do so great a wrong to Blanche.

'Would it be a wrong to her?'

'Are you so blinded by passion as to doubt it?'

'Yes, Dare,' he answered, in a tone of powerfully suppressed emotion, 'I am so blinded by passion, so exhausted by the struggles—' he stopped. 'I cannot think,' he added; 'I only feel.'

'Listen to me then, and do not go farther in—'

'What can I do?' interrupted Frank. He spoke in

a tone of despair. 'Like an idiot, as I was, I almost forced Blanche into this engagement. Again and again she expressed doubt whether it *would* be right for us to marry, when it was but a passionless affection, not love, that we entertained for each other. And when I talked, like a fool, of there being no passion in my nature, she said perhaps it was but dormant, and might awaken hereafter, when too late. Her words were prophetic! But can I now, when—urged against her will into the engagement, she has taught herself to love me—can I—no—impossible! It does not matter what I suffer! I will be true to faith and honor! I will keep my troth to her!'

'Would it be true to act and utter a falsehood? Be merciful to her, and do her not this injury?'

'It shall not be an injury!' he exclaimed, vehemently. 'She shall never know, never suspect—'

'It is idle to say this,' interposed Deville. 'Strive as you will, it is impossible that you can conceal the truth from her. Sooner or later she will discover it. And you seem to forget the moral wrong of which you would be guilty. And, further, do you not know that she would wish you to deal truthfully with her? It is by reversing a case that we can best judge of it. Suppose yourself to be in her place: what if she loved another? Would you desire to possess her hand, when her heart shrank from you?'

Frank strode up and down the chamber several times with very disordered step. Then throwing himself into a chair, he said again, in a voice which seemed hopeless:

'What can I do?'

'Speak to Blanche with entire candor—'

'Impossible! impossible!'

'You must do this, or violate the principles of both Truth and Justice.'

‘But to—no. Her happiness is to me the most sacred of earthly considerations. The most sacred of earthly considerations!’ he repeated.

‘Then dare not to trifle with it by the cruelty you propose. What would be the pain which this knowledge could inflict on her now, to that which she would suffer if, as a wife, she made the discovery, as she most surely would!’

‘But this wild, mad folly of mine; it is too violent to last! When once Blanche is my wife—’

‘Frank, she never will be your wife. Your sense of right may be dimmed momentarily; but I know you better than you know yourself just now, if you think you could commit the weakness and crime of kneeling before God’s altar to perjure your soul. No! at the very foot of the altar, if not before, Truth would wring from you the confession. Do not wait until then to make it! The longer delayed, the more difficult will be the effort. Speak to Blanche at once. To-morrow, if possible, after we leave. You think,’ he continued presently, ‘that she loves you?’

Frank’s pale cheek flushed. ‘I think that, forced by my importunity into the engagement, she taught herself to love me. You look as if you doubted it. Why?’

‘I am sure that, if married to you, her heart would never stray from its rightful allegiance; but I do believe, Frank, that, though herself unconscious of it, she is, at this moment, more *in love* with Edward than with you.’

Frank did not utter a word; but, in an astonishment too profound for speech, gazed in Deville’s face, while the latter continued: ‘I saw plainly, two years ago, what Edward’s sentiments were. He went to Mexico then to avoid her; and I am convinced that it is to escape seeing her become your wife that he is

going again. I do not know that she is aware of his passion now; (I think she saw it formerly,) but I have observed her particularly, and for this, or some other reason, she evidently pities and admires him.'

Frank again bent his face on his hand, while thought, like an electric light, flashed back over the past, illuminating with sudden brightness what had before rested in unheeded obscurity. All the singularity of Edward's manner to Blanche was now explained. He marvelled at his own blindness and that of the others, in not having comprehended it at the time. He felt the greatest remorse for having, though unintentionally, been the cause of a suffering to his brother which he could now fully appreciate. And Blanche—could it be possible that she—but the wild hope died almost as it started to life. 'No, Dare,' he said, in a low tone, without looking up; 'I believe as you say, that Edward loves her—would to Heaven I had known it in time! but she does not love him, or—' he stopped. 'She would not wish to see him the lover of Ximena,' he was about to go on, but shrank from uttering the name of the latter.

'Whether she loves Edward or not—in fact, I am confident that, if so, it is unconsciously—it is certain that she would not wish to marry you under the present circumstances. Do not defer speaking to her, Frank!'

He held out his hand. Frank grasped it silently, and Dare left the room.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN ECLAIRCISSEMENT.

The next morning, as they parted on board the boat, whither Frank had accompanied them, Deville again

gave his hand the strong and expressive clasp with which he had left him the night before—a silent reminder of the counsel he had then pressed upon him. He was almost uneasy at Frank's looks. The latter had obviously not slept at all the night before—and was so pale and haggard, that there had been a general exclamation around the breakfast table that morning at his appearance. Lorimer and Kate urged him warmly to go home with them. He half promised to follow them in a few days—but said he could not go just then; and laughed at the idea of any apprehensions being entertained as to his health.

From the landing he went to Everona—sending word to Blanche that he would not be at Hollywood until the next day. Blanche was very uncomfortable in consequence; as she wished to persuade him to consult Dr. Eldridge about his health—and moreover had felt no slight remorse lately at seeing him so seldom. True it was not her fault—as besides the necessity she had been under of devoting her time to Lucy, Kate, and Ximena, his constant absence from home precluded the possibility of her seeing him often. But still her heart smote her, as she remembered what he said the morning of his return from New Orleans. She felt as if she had neglected him for Ximena. Her spirits were so dull during the rest of the day that both Edward and Ximena were infected by the sombre influence. Ximena was depressed; Edward despairing. He had flattered himself that their guests all out of the way, the rides he had enjoyed so much would be resumed. It was an excessive disappointment to him that this expectation was not fulfilled.

The following day, after breakfast, as Blanche sat alone drawing, she heard Frank's step approaching the sitting room. She threw down her pencil, and

started up eagerly to meet him. After answering her questions as to his health, he stood by her table in silence.

'What is the matter with you, dearest Frank?' she exclaimed anxiously. 'You have not looked or seemed at all like yourself for some time past. Here—sit down by me and tell me what ails you!'

Her tone of affectionate solicitude struck him with a sense of intolerable self-reproach. Instead of complying with her request, he asked—'where are they all this morning? My father, and—Edward.'

'Papa is out riding, of course—and so is Edward, I think.' Frank watched her as she spoke—but perceived not the slightest embarrassment. 'Ximena has a headache, and is trying to sleep it off,' she added.

'Then we shall not be interrupted,' he said, with an air of relief.

'Oh, no.'

He sat down beside her—but almost immediately started up restlessly. 'Come with me to the library, Blanche! I do not like this room. It is too light.'

She looked surprised at his manner; almost apprehensive; but she rose instantly, and they went to the library. Sitting down together on a sofa, Blanche placed her cool hand on his forehead, saying in a tone of earnest entreaty—'Tell me what is the matter, Frank, dearest! I am sure that you are worried about something—and is there any one whom you ought to trust if not myself?'

'I am indeed suffering, Blanche—suffering great anguish,' he replied in a quiet voice—'and though to tell you the cause of this will be an additional torture to me, it must be done. But first, Blanche, promise me solemnly, that you will not deny a request—an entreaty—that I shall make to you!'

Blanche had become very pale—and she now looked up in his face with an expression of doubt and terror, as she answered—‘What need is there of a promise, Frank, when you know you have but to express your wishes for me to fulfil them if I can? What could you ask that I would not grant! But if you prefer it, I promise, certainly, dear Frank! Go on—tell me what it is that troubles you! I would give my life to spare you a moment’s pain. I never knew how I loved you, until I see you, for the first time, suffering.’

He groaned.

‘Pray tell me!’ she continued, in an excited voice—‘You do not know how torturing this suspense is! Nothing you can say will be worse! *What* is the matter, Frank! Tell me! tell me!’

Every shade of color left his face, as he gazed steadily in her eyes for a moment, and then suddenly threw himself on his knees before her. She was inexpressibly shocked by his look, and this act, and tried to raise him.

‘No—in this attitude let me confess the wrong I have done you!’ he said.

She looked aghast and bewildered—while he proceeded, speaking quickly and with effort—

‘Blanche, remember your promise! I shall hold you to it. Blanche, I persuaded, I almost constrained you into promising me your hand—this hand—’ he grasped it convulsively—‘I thought I loved you as much as I was capable of loving—I have discovered my mistake—another—a frantic passion has taken possession of my soul! I have struggled against it—with the very strength of desperation! But, as yet, vainly! And I dared not, Blanche, accept your hand at the altar, with this sin on my soul! The promise I exacted, is that you will bear with me!—that you will forgive this involuntary in-

—fidelity to the faith I owe to you alone!—that you will not utterly despise me!—but when I have conquered this insane passion—as conquer it, I will!—when I have crushed it out of my heart—trampled upon it!”—he spoke with convulsive vehemence, though in a tone scarcely above his breath—“that you will let me then claim this hand—and devote every hour of my future existence to making that happiness—your happiness—which, I swear to you, Blanche, is dearer to me—dearer far to me—than aught and everything on earth!”

With another groan of bitterness, his head sank upon the hand which he still clasped. Blanche was so overwhelmed with pity at sight of his intense anguish, that she bent over him for a moment literally unable to speak. It was a moment of agony to him. He dared not look up, to meet he knew not what doom in her eyes; but at last he felt her tears falling upon his bended neck, as she murmured in music tones of love and soothing—“My darling Frank!—my own dear *brother* Frank! look up, and read in my face that there is no cause for this remorse and suffering!”—he lifted his head, and glanced quickly, fearfully at her—“Rise, dearest Frank!” she went on—“I cannot see you thus! Here!”—she made him sit down again beside her—and pushing the hazel curls back from his brow, she drew it towards her, and pressed a sister’s kiss upon it. She was smiling through the tears that rolled in crystal drops over her flushed cheek. Frank wound his arms around her, and laid his face on her shoulder.

“Oh, how terribly you have frightened me!” she exclaimed, with a hysterical sound between a sob and a laugh. “I could not imagine what the matter was. You are not a person to get into scrapes; but the only idea that occurred to me in a confused and

vague manner was that you must be intending to fight a duel, or—' she laughed outright—'have been gaming desperately, and lost your whole fortune. Very ridiculous, was it not? But now tell me, darling brother, that you are no longer unhappy, and let me be the first to wish success to your love!'

'Blanche!' he cried, in a tone of extreme emotion, 'my heart is racked by a conflict of passion! Do not speak to me so. Remember your promise. I told you that what I ask is forgiveness—'

She laid her hand on his lips. 'I scarcely can forgive you for having endured such a martyrdom as you have been enduring, instead of trusting me at once, and dissolving our engagement.'

'But this thought is intolerable to me! I love you more—more, I verily think, than I ever did before! And that the tie between us should be sundered! Blanche, pity me—bear with me!'

'Did I not always tell you that our love for each other was that of brother and sister, Frank? I know you love me—as I do you—with inexpressible affection. But, to satisfy any farther misgivings you may have, I will confess to you, Frank, that I never wanted to marry you—not even when our bridal day was so near—when I thought I should so soon be yours. I did not shrink, as I should from marrying one to whom I was indifferent, but I felt that I had rather remain free.'

'What a monster of selfishness I have been?' he murmured.

'No, dearest Frank, only a little blind. And God has cleared your vision in time. How grateful we ought to be!'

'Immeasurably so, since I was about to do you so irreparable a wrong as this forced marriage—'

'Oh,' interrupted she, 'we would have been very

happy, I am sure, had the irrevocable vows been spoken ! Now smile. Let me see you yourself again !'

He lifted his face and obeyed, but there was a glittering moisture in his eyes.

'Frank, satisfy me by one word. I tremble to hear it—but no, I cannot be mistaken. It is Ximena, is it not ?' Involuntarily she lowered her voice, soft as had been its tones before.

The crimson flush that suffused his face answered the question.

'How very, very happy this makes me ! Of course it is impossible to judge,' she continued, in reply to his eager, interrogating glance. 'She likes and admires you greatly. She has often told me so. And yesterday she said "you were the only man she ever saw in her life whom she could fancy a hero of romance."' Frank blushed like a girl. 'But, oh ! you need not look so alarmed ! I was only going to add that all this was uttered as innocently as possible, when she considered you an engaged man. I do not know what she will say to you as a lover. You have made one great mistake, however, let me assure you !'

'What is that ?' he inquired apprehensively.

'You should have let her see the struggles of your passion, instead of concealing them as you did !' Blanche answered jestingly. 'Then she would have pitied you, and thought you so interesting.'

Frank smiled his own natural smile for the first time that day, as he said, in something like his usual manner, 'Do you speak from experience ?'

'Experience ? I do not know what you mean. No, I do not pity you one bit ; for if you do not win Ximena, I shall consider it your own fault. You

have a clear field and a disengaged fancy. She never has been in love.'

'Are you sure of this?' he asked quickly.

She nodded her head.

He was holding her left hand, and began absently to bend the tapering alabaster fingers. Blanche pointed to the engagement ring, and said with a smile, 'Take it off, Frank.'

He glanced at her—his face again clouded with pain. 'Can you, Blanche, break the tie that has so long bound us together with indifference—without regret? I cannot. After what you have said, I will not press you farther; but it is exquisitely painful to me to think we are no longer betrothed. Do you not feel it to be so?'

Tears gushed to her eyes, but she answered cheerfully, 'There is a sort of pain—of regret; but I think it is only the passing pang which the word "farewell" always inflicts. We shall not love each other less than heretofore.'

As Frank had not removed the ring, she herself took it off, and slipped it in the pocket of his vest.

'No,' he said, 'you must keep it as a *souvenir* of our engagement.' He looked at her thoughtfully, as he proceeded, 'Blanche, I want to ask you a question?'

'As many as you please,' she answered smiling.

'Did you ever suspect that Edward loves you?'

She blushed deeply. 'I do not think you ought to have asked me this,' she replied gravely, 'but lest you should misinterpret this provoking blush that I feel on my face, I will acknowledge that two years ago, when we first came to Hollywood,' she sighed, 'I did think he admired me. But I have since learned that this was a mistake on my part.'

'A mistake?'

'You look very much disappointed,' said she, laughing. 'Yes, a mistake. His manner, which induced me to take up this idea, was caused by my resemblance to some one else. But, Frank, I really feel as if I had betrayed his confidence, in telling you this. For mercy's sake never let him perceive that you know it. I positively ought not to have mentioned it.'

'And so Dare was wrong!' exclaimed Frank.

'Dare?'

'Yes!' He repeated what Dare had said of Edward, but not his conjecture about herself. 'And you think it was only your resemblance to another person which caused the manner that deceived both Dare and yourself?'

'I know it.'

'Yonder he comes now. I will go and meet him. But tell me again, Blanche, that you do not think me—'

'A jilt?' she cried laughingly. 'Make your conscience perfectly easy. I am just as glad to be free as you are, or nearly as glad—not quite, I suppose!'

He laughed, and started up eagerly to go and meet his brother. Blanche caught his arm and detained him. 'Why should you say anything to Edward just now of this affair?'

'Is it not natural that I should tell him about it? And, by the way, I must, in justice, acknowledge, Blanche, that it is to Dare's exhortations that I owe my deliverance from the tortures of remorse I have been in. I should have had to come to this explanation at last—in fact, I have been nerving myself to this effort ever since I learned that—that Ximena was to stay with you this winter. But had it not been for his urging so strenuously the necessity of—'

immediate confession to you, I should have delayed it to the last possible moment, I fear.'

'Dear Dare! Write, Frank, immediately, and tell him what a good angel to us he was. I will add a postscript to your letter. But do tell me how he came to notice what no one else did.'

'You know he never approved of our engagement. He told me nearly a year ago that I had made a notable mistake in the matter—that Fate never intended you for my wife. I was not aware at the time why he thought so. He was looking to Edward's interests, it seems.'

'Then he made quite as notable a mistake as yourself,' said Blanche, blushing.

'I am not sure of that, your impression notwithstanding.'

'But it is not my impression; it is what Edward himself told me!'

'Humph!' said Frank, with a provoking smile. 'Well, we shall soon tell when he hears that you are free.'

Blanche looked distressed.

'Why this consciousness and blushing, if you really believe that he is not attached to you?'

'Because I am afraid you will let him see your suspicions,' she answered, looking up ingenuously, 'and I always am ashamed to remember the vanity which made me entertain them myself once.'

At this moment, Edward's step passed through the hall and approached the library door. Blanche started up to leave the room, but Frank held her hand firmly, thus detaining her, as he too rose, and, standing by her side, turned an expectant gaze towards the entrance of his brother. Edward advanced lightly. Coming immediately out of the open day, he did not, in the rather dark room, perceive them until he had

approached very near to where they stood. He turned pale, and would have retreated, but was arrested by Frank's voice.

'Edward, you are just in time to offer us your congratulations,' he exclaimed, gayly:

'I thought the time for that ceremony was past, or yet to come,' answered his brother, with a miserable failure in the way of a smile.

'No; it is now that we claim them; but not on the event you would naturally suppose. Blanche and myself have just dissolved our engagement! It is upon the recovery of our liberty that we call for your felicitations.'

'You look incredulous,' pursued Frank, as Edward stood perfectly silent, amazed, transfixed, it seemed, by the unexpected intelligence. 'Blanche has had the barbarity to tell me that she never did want to marry me—'

'After he was so obliging as to inform me that he could not accept my hand,' interrupted she, with an embarrassed attempt to be lively and at ease. But there was that in the expression of Edward's face, as the glances of both now rested upon it, that rebuked and stilled their half-earnest, half-affected mirth. Frank made a step to his side, put his arm around his shoulder, and said, in a tone of deep feeling: 'Believe me, my dear brother, I had not the slightest conception, until within two days past, of the unhappiness I have unintentionally caused you!'

He turned and hurried out of the room, shutting the door as he went. Blanche, without looking at Edward, made a hasty movement towards the door also, but her progress was arrested by an impediment in the way—Edward threw himself at her feet.

Blanche!

There needed not another syllable to speak all the

love that was in his heart, such a world of expression was there in that single utterance as it fell from his lips. And for a moment he said nothing more; but he had taken the hands of Blanche in both his own, and looked up in silence. Reluctantly her eyes fell and met his. It seemed to her that he was transformed; his face was literally radiant.

‘No, Blanche!’ he exclaimed, in a hushed tone of intense passion, as she averted her eyes and tried to withdraw her hands, ‘do not leave me! hear me at least!’

‘Rise,’ she said, softly ‘You do not want to give me pain, Edward?’

He rose instantly, but without releasing the imprisoned hands, led her to the sofa which she had left when he came in. She sank into a seat, and he placed himself by her side.

‘Blanche, you can not but be aware how long, how passionately, how hopelessly I have loved you! From the first moment in which your voice sounded on my ear—’

She turned to him a look of astonishment, as she murmured, ‘You told me that I reminded you of—’

‘Forgive me, if, from a momentary impulse to avoid paining you by a knowledge of the truth, I was guilty of a slight subterfuge.’ He drew from his bosom a gold locket-case, and, bending close to her side, held it before her as he touched the spring. It flew open, and she saw a miniature, which had been copied from the missing daguerreotype.

‘When I thought myself doomed to behold you another’s, I tried to disconnect the Blanche of the present from the Blanche I had first loved! I poured all the passion of my nature upon the mute shade of that which I deemed could never be to me a reality! Do you remember, Blanche, what it was you said,

when you laid your hand on my arm, that first night in the hall? "And this is my other brother, Edward, is it?" I had never even dreamed of love before, or given the most passing thought to the charms of woman! but my heart leaped awake, Blanche, to the first tone of your voice! and it has never slumbered since! And all this waking time has been such a weariness—such a torture! With never, until this moment, one single gleam of hope! Blanche, is it presumptuous in me to hope now?"

Dull is the vision of middle age, so far as matters of sentiment are concerned. Mr. Clerville noticed nothing peculiar in the manner of his sons and of Blanche at the dinner-table that day—but Ximena did. Blanche was flushed and agitated; starting when spoken to, and altogether seeming very absent-minded. Edward, too, had much more color than usual, and his face betokened a state of repressed beatification. And as to talking, he and Frank had decidedly changed characters. For the first time he addressed Ximena with cordial and familiar manner; paying her all those little attentions which had never before seemed to come within the range of his recollection or comprehension. Frank had overtaken her as she was about to descend the stairs, on being summoned to dinner—had inquired about her headache, and walked beside her to the dining-room. But after that, he had been so unusually silent, that she was surprised. As they rose from the table, he asked her if she would ride that afternoon. Some peculiarity in his voice and look while speaking induced her to suppose that he made the invitation merely as a matter of courtesy, and she, therefore, declined going, saying that she thought it would be more prudent not to risk bringing back the headache by any exertion whatever that day. She returned to her chamber

shortly afterwards, and he was left to exercise the virtue of patience until towards sunset, when she descended to the drawing-room with Blanche. She sat down in an arm-chair by a window, through which a flood of golden light was streaming, and leaning back carelessly, as she rested her elbow on the arm of the chair, began to trifle with her fan—furling, unfurling and waving it, with the thoroughly educated grace of a Spanish woman. Frank watched the movements of wrist and hand, and thought that never had flesh or marble been moulded into lines of such exquisite beauty before. Blanche staid near her talking, until he approached—when she sauntered away.

‘What a singular expression your face wears, Mr. Clerville?’ said Ximena, as her eye rested on it with surprise. ‘I am aware that it is never judicious to ask any one what they are thinking of; but I should really like to know what your thoughts are just now! will you tell me?’ she concluded, with a fascinating smile.

‘Most willingly,’ he replied, as he drew nearer and stood beside her chair. ‘I——’

‘Excuse my interrupting you, but pray sit down! it is so much more comfortable than standing.’ She pushed a low ottoman towards him.

Frank did not sit down—but he bent one of his knees upon the ottoman, resting his arm on the marble top of a pier-table beside it, and went on—

‘I was thinking, Miss Yarassa, of an incident in the life of a friend of mine, of which I lately heard. Shall I tell it to you?’

‘Pray do,’ she answered with interest.

‘My friend is a man by no means fanciful; on the contrary, rather prosaic; at least he always considered himself so. There was nothing, he said, of the

restlessness of passion in his nature. This was specially exemplified in his sentiments towards your sex. He had admired passingly a good many women; but he had never been what is called, 'in love.' He looked upon the passion of love, consequently, as a fever from which his peculiar constitution of character exempted him.

'There was one—a lady friend of his she was—whom he admired very much; liked and esteemed. He was not 'in love' with her; he did not profess to herself to be so. But he admired her, as I said—was attached to her; he offered her his hand—and prevailed on her finally to accept it. Their engagement continued for some time—the marriage having been delayed more than once by some accidental circumstance; when fortunately, or unfortunately—you shall judge by the sequel of the story which it was!—he met with another woman, and her he did love. Yes! Despite his presumed insensibility—his attachment to her who held his troth—(and he did entertain for her a sincere affection!) the resistance he opposed to the first faint emotions of his passion—and the steady efforts he continued to exert to subdue it, he loved like a mad-man!

'Imagine, if you can, Miss Yarassa—I will not attempt to depict—his struggles and his agonies! Affection, honor, gratitude, generosity, binding him to his betrothed!—but, opposed to these, a passion that seemed irresistible!—that, like the torrent of a mighty river, swept away, as straws and feathers, every restraint he attempted to impose upon it! The conflict of his soul was fearful! What do you think he ought to have done?

He trembled to hear her answer.

'I cannot tell.' She bent forward with a gesture of eager listening, and fixed her dark eyes more earn-

estly upon his face. His own eyes fell beneath that gaze; and glancing down at a book upon the table, he continued —

‘ Urged by a sense of integrity—and encouraged by the counsels of a friend—he went to his affianced and frankly avowed the truth. Implored her to forgive his involuntary error!—to pity, if she could not love him still!—and to bear with him patiently until he could conquer his frenzied passion, and give her again an undivided heart. Do you think this was selfishness.’

‘ Rather a noble courage, that dared to do anything but deceive.’

‘ Frank could not, for a moment, command his voice to proceed, and she exclaimed with impatient interest.

‘ And what said his affianced?’

‘ She released him gladly from an engagement into which she had entered reluctantly, and from which she rejoiced to be free. ‘Need I say that he hastened to lay his heart at the feet of her who had been his uncontrollable choice! How do you think she received his homage? Ought the circumstance of his former engagement to have weighed with her against him?’

‘ I think surely not,’ answered Ximena, innocently.

‘ He told her of his love—of his struggles! He implored her to grant him that hand, without the possession of which, life would be to him but a weariness and burden.’

‘ And what was her reply?’

‘ I do not know,’ he said, lifting his eyes suddenly, and gazing full into her own. ‘ I wait to hear it, Ximena! I ask but one thing now; that you will entertain my suit; that you will permit me to endeavor to win your heart!’

Ximena answered not a word. She had started violently when he lifted his eyes and said, 'I wait to hear it'—seeming for a moment incredulous. Her head dropped then upon her hand; she sat silent. Frank rose from the ottoman, as a servant entered the room with lights, and drawing back into the shadow, stood with folded arm; silent also.

And so nearly an hour elapsed.

John's 'Walk into tea, Miss Ximena,' roused the young lady from what must have been a very deep reverie—for she had not moved once during the time Frank had been watching her, since she had dropped her head upon her hand. She started, rose hastily, and answered the summons to tea—without looking towards him as he followed her.

Blanche was already sitting at the tea tray when they entered, and caught a glimpse of Frank's face first of the two. It was so pale that she was alarmed; but a glance at Ximena re-assured her crimson cheeks, downcast eyes, a tremulous and timid consciousness of manner! All very encouraging signs, she thought. Frank evidently was not of this opinion. His eye met her's once, and it expressed such a depth of despondency, that she made the movement to leave the tea table as soon as she possibly could; anxious to whisper a word of cheer to him. Ximena went up stairs immediately. Blanche took Frank's arm with her usual familiar ease, and led him into the drawing room. 'Well!' she exclaimed, as soon they were alone.

'No hope for me, I fear.'

'Why do you think so?'

'She did not speak, and you saw that she did not even look towards me just now.'

'And this is the ground of your fears? Oh, little skilled of Cupid's lore! Foolish man, take courage!

You could not desire more favorable symptoms!—
Shall I ask her to go on the river?

'If you think I may still hope.'

'I do indeed.'

She ran up stairs—and so great was her eagerness, that she opened Ximena's door without remembering the preliminary ceremony of knocking. Ximena was standing in the middle of the floor—and uttered an exclamation of startled surprise as Blanche put her arm around her waist.

'Will you come and go on the river?—it is a beautiful night!'

Ximena hesitated.

'If you only knew how he loves you!' whispered Blanche softly. 'My dearest Ximena—but I will not say a word! If your heart does not plead for him, my words can avail nothing. Will you come?'

'I must change my dress, then, first, dear Blanche.'

She spoke in an agitated voice.

'Shall I ring for Juanita?—or—let me help you myself?'

'I had rather be alone a little while.'

'But you will certainly come?'

'Yes.'

Blanche left her.

Frank was waiting at the foot of the stairs when Ximena came down. He offered his arm—saying that Blanche and Edward had gone on before. As he spoke he observed, with chagrin, that she wore her riding-hat, with the veil down—by which double precaution, her face was entirely concealed from his view. They walked in absolute silence at least half way to the river; but Frank stopped resolutely then, unable to endure the suspense longer. 'What he said and what she answered—is it not written in the calendars of Cupidon?—and doth not the same

